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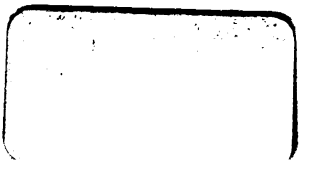
AN
(Dennis)
Paul



AN
(Dennis)
Paul

Columbia University.

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Bishop.

JOHN DENNIS: HIS LIFE AND CRITICISM

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JOHN DENNIS

HIS LIFE AND CRITICISM

BY

H. G. PAUL, Ph.D.

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A. H. THORNDIKE,

Secretary.

PREFACE

John Dennis's career was one of prolonged and various activities, covering a period of nearly a half century. He associated with some of the wits of the time of Charles II; he was on intimate terms with Dryden; he was a notable figure in the age of the so-called Augustans; and he lived to be pitied and befriended by Thomson and Mallet. The study of such a career of diverse and extended activity should be of value in promoting a clearer understanding of the literary relations of that interesting age. One of Dennis's manifold activities is worthy of especial consideration—namely, his labors as a critic. For nearly two centuries he has been remembered chiefly as the severe judge and foe of some of the great writers of the first quarter of the eighteenth century and has been cited as a horrible example of the race of critics by a host of biographers and admirers of Addison and Steele, of Swift and Pope. In the last twenty years, however, something of a reaction has begun in Dennis's favor; and while no one finds in his dramas or poems much that deserves immortality, many students of his period are coming to recognize in him "a serious and well equipped critic" and one whose beliefs are of especial interest as belonging to the period when English criticism was young. By many of his contemporaries Dennis was regarded as the foremost English critic of his times, and few or none of the writers of his age can be considered so fully representative of the manifold critical tendencies then struggling for supremacy.

In attempting this study of Dennis I have limited myself to what seemed best worth while, that is, to a discussion of his biography and of his work as a critic. In tracing the course of his life I have been obliged in large measure to break new ground, for practically the only study of Dennis's career is the useful but necessarily brief article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The life itself seems to fall naturally into three fairly well marked divisions—the first to the death

of Dryden in 1700, the second through the first decade of the eighteenth century, and the last from 1710 to the time of his death in 1734, a period characterized by his well known literary quarrels. In dealing with Dennis as a judge of letters I have first outlined the chief critical tendencies of his time and have afterwards attempted to indicate his relations with these various schools as shown in his attitude toward the great questions then debated in the republic of letters. I have tried to point out how Dennis anticipated some ideas that have generally been credited to later critics, and how his appreciation of the great national writers was truer and keener than that of most of his contemporaries. I have also attempted to study the question of his influence upon subsequent criticism.

The subject of this dissertation was suggested to the writer by Professors W. P. Trent and A. H. Thorndike, of Columbia University, who have been unfailing in their helpfulness, giving generously of their time and scholarship and counsel through all the different stages of the growth of the thesis. The writer realizes only too keenly how inadequate must be any acknowledgment of his indebtedness to both of them. To Professor J. E. Spingarn thanks are due both for the books he loaned and for the still more valuable assistance of his advice from time to time and his suggestions for revision. Professor C. N. Greenough of Harvard kindly loaned some rare books from his private library; and Mr. Carl VanDoren called attention to one of Dennis's belated publications. Mr. William Roberts, Dennis's first careful biographer, has also encouraged the writer and offered some valuable hints. Acknowledgment is also due many librarians both in America and in England who have aided in the search for Dennis's scattered writings.

LIFE OF DENNIS

I

John Dennis was born in London in 1657.[1] His father, Francis Dennis, was a saddler who seems to have been a fairly prosperous and influential citizen at a time when the London tradesmen were gaining rapidly both in wealth and power.[2] Nothing further is known of the family except that the father died about 1685, and that Dennis had at least one sister.[3] When he was twelve years old he was sent to the grammar school at Harrow, which was then just beginning to receive "foreigners," that is, boys from other parishes who paid for their schooling.[4] Possibly Dennis was attracted to Harrow by the fact that the school had just come under the management of Dr. William Horn, or Horne, whom one of Dennis's biographers has characterized as "pious and learned." The new master brought with him many of the methods he

[1] The first and one of the best biographies of Dennis is that by his friend Charles Gildon in the *Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets —First begun by Mr. Langbaine, improv'd and continu'd down to this time by a Careful Hand.* London, 1699. Dennis himself supplied much of the material for this sketch of his life.

[2] The enemies of Dennis's later years made frequent disparaging references to his father's occupation. One such, for example, is that by the anonymous author of the *Critical Specimen,* 1715, p. 9: "The Mirror of Criticism [Dennis] being thus mounted [on his Pegasus] without a saddle, for he scorned to use one of his father's making." Again, in the preface of an *Author to Let,* probably by Savage, which appeared during the war following the publication of the *Dunciad,* we find the following: "Should the author of the Dunciad declare that the great Mr. Dennis (the Son of a Saddler) had better have been a common Parish Crier, than a Poet or Critick? Have not forty Years, and upwards, witness'd the Truth of this?"

[3] *Original Letters, Familiar, Moral and Critical By Mr. Dennis. In Two Volumes* (but usually bound together and paged consecutively). London, 1721, p. 45. These letters form one of the chief sources of information concerning Dennis's life and opinions. In subsequent notes they will be referred to as *Original Letters.*

[4] *Encyclopedia Brittanica,* 9th edition, *s. v. Harrow.*

had known at Eton,[5] and under his supervision Dennis was well trained in the fundamentals of the classics. There is little else to record of the lad's five years at Harrow except that among his mates was Lord Francis Seymour, with whom he was afterwards to visit the continent.

On the thirteenth of January, 1675, Dennis entered Caius College, Cambridge, as a common scholar. The relations between Cambridge and Harrow were not especially close at this time, and no reason can be given for his choice except, possibly, the reviving prestige after the Civil War of this university which was fairly in accord with Dennis's religious views. Dr. Robert Brady, who as one of the royal physicians divided his time between London and Cambridge, was then head master of the college. Probably he made little or no impression on Dennis, who has left no mention either of him or of any of his fellow students at Cambridge. Jeremy Collier, we may here note, finished his seventh year of residence at Caius and was granted his M.A. when Dennis was a freshman; and in 1679, the year that our author obtained his B.A., Samuel Garth received the same degree from Peterhouse.[6] Dennis must have employed his days and nights to better advantage than did most of his fellow undergraduates, for he acquired a knowledge of the classics which in later years gained him a reputation for scholarship. In time he became one of the seventy-five scholars in Caius and continued such till March 4, 1680, when the following extract, under the title "Sir Dennis sent away," appeared in the Cambridge *Gesta Book:* "At a meeting of the masters and fellows, Sir Dennis mulcted 3 l., and his scholarship taken away, and he sent out of the college for assaulting and wounding Sir Glenham[7] with a sword." Dr. Farmer asserts[8] that Dennis stabbed his man

[5] *Great Public Schools,* London, n. d., the article on Harrow by Thornton, Butler, and Martineau, p. 66.

[6] It is possible that during these years Garth and Dennis became friends. Twenty-five years later the Doctor exerted himself to secure subscriptions for his fellow Cantabrigian's *Criticism upon our most Celebrated English Poets Deceas'd.*

[7] Sir Glenham was probably Charles Glenham, B.A., Caius, 1678; M.A., 1682.

[8] *Essay on the Learning of Shakespere,* 2d ed., London, 1825, p. 14, n.

in the dark, and that many years afterwards the tradition of the affair lingered in the college.[9] As it was then no uncommon thing for a student expelled from one college to go over to another, Dennis soon registered in Trinity Hall, of which Sir Thomas Exton was the headmaster. There is little to record of these years except that Dennis made occasional trips to town, where, doubtless, he saw many of the contemporary plays in which he was much interested.[10] Among the visitors to Cambridge in 1680 was the Princess Anne, to whom, as Queen, Dennis was afterwards to dedicate his most important poem. In the following year the King and Queen were elaborately entertained at Cambridge, as is shown by the record of the university expenses at that time.[11] We do not know how far, if at all, Dennis improved this opportunity to exhibit his loyalty,[12] but we do know that he took advantage of another occasion that same year, for he then composed his earliest extant poem, *Upon the Fleet then fitting out. Written in 1682.* The following year he received his M.A. from

[9] In answer to the doubts expressed by Kippis, who wrote the account of Dennis for the second edition of the *Biographia Brittanica,* Dr. Farmer says: "I might plead in the first place that if it were *not* true, I gave it only as I received it from the late Master of the college, Sir John Burrough, to whose accuracy in a thousand anecdotes, every one who knows him will be a willing witness; and I add the testimony of Dr. Smith, the *present* Master, who declared it to be a well-remembered tradition, when he first knew the college fifty years ago." First quoted by Dr. Farmer in the *European Magazine,* XXV (1794), 412. *Cf.* the article on Dennis in the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

[10] Nearly forty years later Dennis commented on the manner in which the fight waged over Settle's *Emperess of Morocco* extended to the university, and how the "young Fry inclin'd to Elkanah." Preface to the *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer,* 1717.

[11] C. H. Cooper's *Cambridge Annals,* Cambridge, 1845, III, 589 ff.

[12] "The 18th, [October, 1681] an indictment of high treason was preferred at the Old Baily against Mr. John Rouse: there were eight witnesses, viz., Mr. Wyatt . . . and Mr. Dennis, who all charged him with treasonable expressions;" Luttrell, *Brief historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678–April 1714,* Oxford, 1857, I, 137. Whether the Mr. Dennis here mentioned was John Dennis cannot be determined. The Cambridge student was then twenty-four, and he may have been at home for a brief time.

Trinity Hall.[13] Soon after leaving Cambridge Dennis inherited property from his father and from an uncle, "who was," says one of the critic's biographers,[14] "if not an alderman, a wealthy citizen of London."

On coming into this inheritance, Dennis proceeded with his Harrow schoolmate, Lord Francis Seymour, upon a tour of France and Italy. Voltaire states[15] that Dennis spent only fifteen days[16] in France and ridicules as hasty and ill grounded his opinion that the people of that country are civil to strangers "not as they imagine it a duty but an accomplishment." Voltaire was doubtless wrong in his statement regarding the length of Dennis's stay in France, but right in his censures of that traveller's general attitude toward the French. Led by his stout English prejudice, which seems to have been intensified by his travels,[16a] Dennis saw in every Frenchman a "Narcissus," who "in the flattering glass of his own false imagination is eternally gazing on himself, or at least what he takes for himself." In fact he seems to have found but little in France that pleased him; he showed but slight enthusiasm for the art treasures of the capital; and he considered the Parisian theaters very unsatisfactory[17] as compared with those

[13] *Trinity Hall* in *Cambridge University College Series,* London, 1902, p. 167.

[14] The *Life of Mr. John Dennis, the Renowned Critick. In which are likewise Some Observations on most of the Poets and Criticks, his Contemporaries,* Anon., London, 1734, p. 7.

[15] *Oeuvres, avec Préfaces, Avertissements, Notes,* etc. Par M. Benchot, Paris, 1829, XXXVII, 22.

[16] How long Dennis really was in France is not known. After he had been in Italy five or six weeks, however, he wrote to a friend that he had spent a longer time in France. See p. 141 of Dennis's *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* 1693, a volume from which is derived most of our information regarding this tour. Against Voltaire's statement may also be cited a passage in the *Epistle Dedicatory* of Dennis's *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 1701: "I know by experience that a man may travel o'er most of the western parts of Europe, without meeting three Foreigners, who have any tolerable knowledge of it [the English language]."

[16a] "And it is amusing to find Addison . . . making his Tory foxhunter declare this anti-Gallican temper the main fruit of foreign travel." Courthope's *Addison,* in the *English Men of Letters* Series, p. 39.

[17] In the preface to his drama *Iphigenia* Dennis mentioned with a touch of pride the hum of admiration which went round the audience at the

of London. His dislike for Paris was, in all probability, intensified by the ill health he suffered there, so we are not surprised to learn that he was glad to leave that city and to proceed to Marseilles. Of his stay in this latter city he has left no record beyond a chance allusion[18] to his astonishment at the sight of priests there serving sentence in the galleys. From Marseilles he took the customary route of travel of his day back to Lyons, whence on the nineteenth of October, 1688, he began the journey across the Alps to Italy. Six days later he was in Turin. In striking contrast with Addison who later took the same trip, Dennis enjoyed keenly the passage of the mountains. Throughout his life he showed a delight in the wilder aspects of nature, but the mountains filled him, he says,[19] "with a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy."

"At the same time," he continued, "I had an infinite Pleasure, I trembled;" adding, "I am delighted, 'tis true, at the prospect of Hills and Valleys, of flowry Meads, and murmuring Streams, yet it is a delight that is consistent with Reason, a delight that creates and improves Meditation. But transporting Pleasures followed the sight of the Alps, and what unusual Transports think you are those, that are mingled with Horrours, and sometimes almost with Dispair?"

From Turin he made his way to Rome, though by what route he nowhere definitely states. One sentence in a letter written many years later, however, offers a hint as to his

discovery of the identity of the heroine. The author of a *Comparison Between the Two Stages,* 1702, p. 38, sarcastically refers thus to Dennis's comment: "Surprise and Astonishment! Nay, such a thing had never happened since Thespis rode in a Cart, unless at one of Corneille's, who by the way was one of his most intimate Acquaintance; for, continues he [Dennis], I had one day the honor to sit by that same Author at a Tragedy of his in Paris, and by and by comes such a turn that the People murmur'd again, they were so surprised." But Pierre Corneille died in 1684, so that we must consider the above either a piece of banter or, less probably, a reference to the great dramatist's brother, Thomas.

[18] Dennis's *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind,* 1698, reprinted in his *Miscellaneous Tracts,* 1725, p. 402.

[19] *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* 1693, p. 134. This same sort of rapture, tinged with a customary patriotic prejudice, is exhibited in a letter to Thomas Sargent, written nearly thirty years afterwards: "In a late Journey which I took into the Wild of Sussex, I pass'd over a Hill which shew'd me a more transporting sight than ever the Country had shewn me before either in England or in Italy." *Original Letters,* p. 31.

course and also affords further illustration of his love of "transporting Sights:"[20]

"The Prospects, which in Italy pleas'd me most, were that of *Valdarno* from the *Apennins*, that of *Rome* and the *Mediterranean*, from the mountain of *Viterbo;* of *Rome* at Forty, and of the *Mediterranean* at Fifty Miles distance from it, and that of the *Campagne* of *Rome*, from *Tiuoli* and *Frescati;* from which two Places, you see every FOOT of the famous Campagne, even from the Bottom of *Tiuoli* and *Frescati*, to the very Foot of the Mountain of *Viterbo* without any thing to intercept your Sight."

In Rome, he tells us,[21] he was astonished by the statue of Laocoön, "which does not appear to be a work of art, but the miserable creature himself." As for the Italians themselves, he found them as reserved to strangers as the French had been open. He was, indeed, deeply interested in studying these people and concluded that they had degenerated through the sins of their ancestors. How long he remained in Italy, or when or how he journeyed back to England, cannot, it seems, be determined.

On his return to England,[21a] about the time of the deposition of James, Dennis declared for the new government and began to mingle with the wits and men of letters of the town.[22] The accession of William had deprived Dryden of his position as poet laureate and royal historiographer, but it could not take

[20] *Original Letters*, p. 31.

[21] See his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, 1701, p. 31.

[21a] ". . . it is plain that to a considerable detriment to my little affairs, I declar'd for the Government at a time when I had no Encouragement, nor any Prospect of receiving the least Return;" Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, 1696.

[22] The *Critical Specimen*, Anon., 1715, p. 11, proposed a number of titles for chapters of Dennis's life, of which one reads thus: "Chapter III. How after leaving College he generously despised the *Narrow Souled Principles*, taught there, and fell in with the *Modern free and daring Principles* of the Town, as favouring much more of *Publick* Spirit, together with his Private Reasons for doing so." It is interesting also to note that at this time Dennis lived on friendly terms with men as different as the profligate rascal, Fleetwood Shepherd and the future Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Atterbury. We learn from Atterbury's *Correspondence*, 1783, I, 262, n., that "The Bishop and Mr. Dennis were very intimate at their first setting out in the world (especially when his Lordship was at the Rolls)." May not the two also have been joined more closely by their common admiration of Milton?

from him the literary dictatorship of England. Even Dorset, who was forced to remove him from office, had shown his esteem for the poet by a liberal present from his own private purse; and his example had been followed by others, such as Dryden's old friend Mulgrave. At Will's coffee-house the aging poet regained and held his old time power so successfully that "a pinch from Dryden's snuff box was equal to taking a degree in the academy of wit."[23] Further evidence of Dryden's popularity is afforded us by such comments as that by Shaftsbury, in his *Characteristics*,[24] upon the "young fry" that surrounded the old dictator as admirers, champions, and imitators. Among these young men one of the most prominent was Dennis, who "made court" to his fellow Cantabrigian, addressed the old poet as a close friend, gained many critical ideas from him, and warmly championed his fame in the following century against the growing reputation of Pope.[25] Dennis confessed that, although he usually found his letters to his friends a light task,[26] in writing to Dryden he missed

[23] Dryden's *Works* (Scott and Saintsbury), Edinburgh, 1882, I, 311. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Dryden's works will be to this edition.

[24] "They are his guards ready to take arms for him, if by some presumptuous Critic he is at any time attacked. They are indeed the very shadows of their immediate predecessor, and represent the same features, with some alterations perhaps for the worse. They are sure to aim at nothing beyond or above their Master, and would on no account give him the least jealousy of their aspiring to any degree or order of writing above him. From hence the harmonious and reciprocal esteem, which on such a bottom as this, cannot fail of being perfectly established among our poets." *Miscellaneous Reflections*, London, 1900, II, 327.

[25] "How many were there in Mr. Dryden's Life-time, who endeavour'd to make him believe, that I should be the foremost, if I surviv'd him, of all his Acquaintance to arraign his Memory; whereas I am he of all his Acquaintances, who, tho' I flatter'd him least while living, having been content to do him justice behind his back and before his Enemies Face, am now the foremost to assert his Merit and vindicate his Glory." *Original Letters*, p. 291.

[26] "Tho' no Man writes to his Friends with greater Ease, or with more Chearfulness, than Myself; and tho' I have lately had the Presumption to place you at the head of that small Party, nevertheless I have experienc'd with Grief, that in writing to you I have not my old Facility. . . . My extraordinary Inclination to shew that I honour you at an extraordinary

his customary ease through his great desire to do well. Dryden, in his turn, esteemed Dennis highly[27] and declared him to be one of the greatest masters of the Pindaric ode[28] and a better critic than Perrault. His regard for Dennis is further shown by the singularly interesting correspondence that passed between them and by his contribution of a translation of one of Voiture's letters to the selections from that author with which Dennis concluded his *Letters upon Several Occasions,* 1696. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Dennis appearing as Dryden's champion in the literary quarrels of the time, and we may regard it as at least curious that practically all of our author's critical writings before 1700 were directed against those who had opposed his master. Dennis first took arms against Rymer, who had supplanted Dryden as royal historiographer,[29] and whom Dryden had

rate, and to shew it in words that might not be altogether unworthy Mr. Dryden's Perusal, incapacitates me to perform the very Action to which it incites me." Dennis's *Letters upon Several Occasions,* 1696, p. 46.

[27] Dryden's intimacy with Dennis is also shown by the old poet's habit of relating to his admirer literary anecdotes and reminiscences, of which the following may serve as illustrations: "The only play that ever Mr. Cowley wrote was barbarously treated the first night, as the late Mr. Dryden has more than once informed me, who has told me that he went to see it with the famous Mr. Sprat, now Bishop of Rochester, and that after the play was done, they both made a visit to Mr. Cowley, whom the death of his Brother had obliged to keep to the House, and that Mr. Cowley received the news of his ill-success with not so much firmness as might be expected of so great a man." Dennis's *Large Account of the Taste in Poetry,* prefatory to the *Comical Gallant,* 1702. One other illustration—"And yet Mr. Dryden at that time knew not half the extent of his [Milton's] Excellence, as more than Twenty Years afterwards he confess'd to me, and it is pretty plain from his writing the *State of Innocence.*" *Original Letters,* p. 75.

[28] "There is another part of Poetry in which the *English* stand almost upon an equal foot with the Ancients; and 'tis that which we call the Pindarick, introduc'd, but not perfected by our famous Mr. *Cowley:* and of this, Sir, you are certainly one of the greatest Masters. You have the Sublimity of Sense as well as of Sound; and know how far the Boldness of a Poet may lawfully extend. I could wish you would cultivate that kind of Ode, and reduce it either to the same Measures which Pindar us'd, or give new Measures of your own." Dennis's *Works,* II, 504.

[29] For an account of the relations between Dryden and Rymer, see Dryden's *Works,* I, 317. Cf. Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* II, 342.

attacked both in the preface to his translation of Ovid and, with greater bitterness, in his Preface to the *Third Miscellany.*[80] Dryden also prepared the "Heads" of an answer to Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy;* but he never published this reply, possibly because so many of his views were expressed by Dennis in the *Impartial Critick,* 1693. At any rate, the resemblance between this book and Dryden's notes is quite sufficient to justify Mr. Saintsbury's query[81] whether Dennis had not been permitted to see the "Heads." Again, Dryden had proposed to criticize Blackmore's *Prince Arthur,* since the preface to that epic contained "some personal reflections aimed at him directly."[82] Indeed as he afterwards stated in the preface to the *Fables,* Dryden felt that Blackmore had taken the hint for *Prince Arthur* from his preface to the translation of *Juvenal;* and he went on to complain that, instead of acknowledging an obvious indebtedness, the poetaster had rather traduced him in a libel.[83] It seems not improbable, therefore, that Dennis may have received encouragement from Dryden to criticize Blackmore's popular epic. Dennis also replied in 1698 to Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage,* in which Dryden's plays had been censured. He further showed his admiration for his master by writing *To Mr. Dryden upon his Translation of the Third Book of Virgil's Georgics. Pindarick Ode.*[84] This poem, which was one of the most popular of Dennis's poetical productions, was published in Tonson's *Miscellanies* and was afterwards incorporated in our author's *Works.*

It was, however, no blind admiration that Dennis bestowed upon the older poet and critic. He recognized, for example, Dryden's failure to appreciate Milton[85] and took him to task for censuring Wycherley's portrayal of characters in the *Plain*

[80] *Ibid.,* XV, 53.

[81] *History of Criticism,* II, 129.

[82] Dryden's *Works,* I, 351.

[83] Dryden probably never forgave Blackmore's attacks, for he afterwards pilloried the physician in the poem *To My Honoured Kinsman, John Dryden,* in the preface to the *Fables,* and in the prologue for the *Pilgrim.*

[84] "Addison paid an early tribute to Dryden's fame by the verses addressed to him on his translations." Dryden's *Works,* I, 312.

[85] *Original Letters,* p. 75.

Dealer.[36] Furthermore, he has left us, as Lowell has justly observed, a most discriminating characterization[37] of his master as "my departed Friend, whom I infinitely esteem'd when living for the Solidity of his Thought, for the Spring, the Warmth, and the beautiful Turn of it; for the Power and Variety, and Fullness of his Harmony; for the Purity, the Perspecuity, the Energy of his Expression: and (whenever the following great Qualities were requir'd) for the Pomp, Solemnity, and Majesty of his Style."

Next in authority to Dryden in the circle at Will's coffee house was Congreve. The relations between these two writers had been close and friendly from the time of their introduction to each other, when Dryden had read the *Old Bachelor* and had pronounced it "the best first play" he had ever seen. Dennis, too, held a high opinion of Congreve's ability and regarded him as the greatest living writer of comedy, "excepting only Mr. Wycherley."[38] Pope, however, sneered[39] at Dennis as intruding upon Congreve and Wycherley, "obtaining some correspondence with them," and "immediately obliging the world with their letters." That Dennis was proud of his literary associations is undoubtedly true, but the tone of the letters and other evidences are of such a nature as to show that he was not regarded as an intruder. Otherwise Congreve would hardly have written him the long and painstaking letter on the nature of humor,[40] a subject which the author believed had never been treated before; and his request that Dennis would set him right, if he should be in the wrong, seems more than a perfunctory compliment. About this time, too, Dennis probably published his *Letters on Milton and Congreve,* which have since been lost.[41] Through the early

[36] Proposals for Printing by subscription . . . *Miscellaneous Tracts written by Mr.* John Dennis, 1721.

[37] *Original Letters,* p. 291. Quoted by Lowell in his essay on Dryden.

[38] Dennis's *Works,* I, 526.

[39] Pope's *Works* (Elwin and Courthope), 1871–1889, IV, 109. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Pope's writings will be to this edition.

[40] *Letters upon Several Occasions: Written by and between Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherley, Mr. . . . , Mr. Congreve, and Mr. Dennis. With a New Translation of Select Letters of Monsieur Voiture.* London, 1696, pp. 80 ff.

[41] *Infra,* p. 28.

years of the eighteenth century the two remained on terms of at least nominal friendship.[42] Later, when Steele accused Dennis of having abused Congreve, the critic retorted thus:[43] "As for my having been severe with Mr. Congreve, it is a figure of speech, which Jeremy says, in Love for Love, interlards the greater part of his conversation." Charles Wilson, Congreve's biographer, asserts[44] that in their later life "Congreve was continually bestowing upon Dennis pecuniary favours;" and that he had often heard Congreve "say of the two evils, it was better to have Dennis's Flattery than his Gall." In some other matters Wilson is not a perfectly impartial judge of Dennis, so we may discount his statement somewhat, while admitting that as it concerns the author's old age, it may be true. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that in 1721 Dennis addressed to Congreve his letter *In Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer,* in which he praised Congreve as "a better Judge than" himself and declared that in defending the author of the *Plain-dealer* he was also defending the author of the *Double-dealer.* Last of all it is to be noted in tracing the relations of these two authors that Congreve probably received this letter favorably, for his name is found among the subscribers for Dennis's *Miscellaneous Tracts* in which was printed the letter just mentioned. As this volume was not published till 1727, Congreve's name appeared in this list of subscribers just two years before his death.

Once as a student coming up to town, so Dennis states in a letter to Richardson Pack,[45] he drank the health of Mr.

[42] Later, though they saw less of each other, Congreve is said to have acted as a peace maker between Dennis and Addison and to have induced the latter to subscribe for the former's *Works.* See *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Amours of William Congreve,* by Charles Wilson, London, 1730, II, 135. Leigh Hunt in his *Biographical . . . Notices of . . . Congreve* attributes this book to John Oldmixon.

[43] J. Nichols, The *Theatre, By Sir Richard Steele, with the Anti-Theatre, &.* London, 1791, II, 432. In subsequent references this will be mentioned as the *Theatre.*

[44] *Memoir . . . of Congreve,* II, 135.

[45] Dennis's *Original Letters,* p. 214. Also in Pack's *New Collection of Miscellanies in Prose and Verse,* London, 1725.

Wycherley, under the title of Captain Wycherley; and he goes on to relate a number of incidents which show an unusually intimate knowledge of this man whom Dryden was proud to call his friend.[46] As has been stated above, Dennis considered Wycherley the greatest contemporary writer of comedy, and he did not hesitate frequently to reaffirm this belief. Wycherley, in his turn, wrote Dennis occasional letters and declared that he valued his friendship more than he should a title.[47] Many years later Pope included in his published correspondence[48] a letter purporting to be from Wycherley, in which the latter threatened "to print your letters as Dennis did mine, without your knowledge." Possibly this letter is authentic; but knowing Pope's habits of doctoring his correspondence, we may well regard it with suspicion along with the laudatory verses which Dennis said[49] Pope wrote and published in Wycherley's name, thus securing for himself some commendation and for Wycherley the blame of the bad verse-making. Furthermore, Dennis states in the very beginning of the dedication to Lord Halifax of his volume containing the Wycherley letters,[50] "As soon as I had resolv'd to make this Address to you, that the Present might not be altogether unworthy of you, I took care to obtain the Consent of my Friends to publish some Letters, which they had writ in answer to mine." Six years after Wycherley's death Dennis published in his *Proposals for printing* his *Miscellaneous Tracts,* 1721, the letter to Congreve in *Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer,* which we noticed in the preceding paragraph. The critic here defends this comedy against the charge that its wit is forced and not fitted to the characters, though he acknowledges that in some other respects the comedy is not faultless. Incidentally, it may be added, Dennis here contributes a few incidents to Wycherley's biography, stating,

[46] Preface to the *State of Innocence.*

[47] Dennis's *Works,* II, 494. Their correspondence touches a variety of themes, ranging from Wycherley's good-natured raillery at Dennis's pet aversion to puns and punning to his serious advice about the latter's love affairs.

[48] *Works,* VI, 41.

[49] *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Dunciad, 1729,* p. 6.

[50] *Letters upon Several Occasions,* 1696.

for example, that the Duke of Buckingham once "lent him 500 l. upon his own single bond, in his father's life time."

Dennis's friendship with another member of the Dryden group, Charles Gildon, has been recorded in the *Dunciad.*[51] In 1694 Gildon issued his *Letters and Essays on Several Subjects: To Dryden . . . Dennis and other Ingenious men of the Day,* addressing to Dennis what is probably the most important essay of the volume, his *Vindication of Love in Tragedies against Rapin and Mr. Rymer.* To him we are also indebted for the first biography of Dennis, since he edited and enlarged the 1699 edition of Langbaine, giving what is probably an accurate, though a meager, account of the first forty years of the critic's life. Gildon is also generally regarded as the author of a *Comparison Between the Two Stages,* 1702, which contains some tart criticism of Dennis's plays. The keenness of the writer, his sharp and ready tongue, together with the disagreement between the critical dicta there expressed and those usually entertained by Gildon, seem, to the present writer at least, to make doubtful his authorship of the book.

Among the other literary friends of the critic who may be mentioned briefly, the most important is Addison, who is also to be counted among the disciples of Dryden.[52] Neither Dennis nor Addison has left any recorded cause for difference before 1710; and even at the time of their greatest disagreement the former considered the latter a man of remarkable parts.[53] To Prior Dennis wrote a letter on the relative merits of Horace and Juvenal, which he afterwards published without date. The tone of the letter is that of respect and consideration, and we may note occasional phrases[54] that seem to indicate a long established acquaintance. With the gentle Southerne, who sat on Dryden's left, Dennis was on especially good terms; and he later gratefully acknowledged this friend's

[51] *Dunciad,* III, ll. 172–173.

[52] Addison had addressed his first poetical essays to Dryden and had also written the arguments prefixed to the several books of the old poet's translation of the *Aeneid.*

[53] *Original Letters,* p. 173.

[54] *Ibid.,* p. 430.

help in planning his play *Liberty Asserted.* With Maynwaring[55] and Moyle,[56] other members of the Dryden coterie, Dennis lived in intimate relations, proud of the praise of the former, and maintaining an affection for the latter which a separation of twenty years could not stifle.

The circle at Will's, however, formed but a part of Dennis's friends and acquaintances. Whatever fortune he inherited disappeared rapidly under his careless management, so that he was forced to pay an ever increasing attention to the patrons of the day, especially to the great political leaders. To the man of letters of the late seventeenth century, politics meant much, for they led to a patronage, which, while neither remarkably great nor entirely secure, afforded almost the only income for any poet who did not write plays.

In the earlier years following his return from the continent Dennis's writings show a very moderate interest in politics, so that it is not surprising that early in 1694 he should declare to Dryden that "all who are at present concern'd for their Country's Honour, harken more after your Preparatives, than those for the next Campaign."[57] Possibly it is not too much to say that Dennis would have ranked Dryden very close to his favorite King William as the great national hero. For the latter Dennis, like Defoe, always manifested a passionate admiration, which found expression in nearly every poem on state affairs he ever composed—from his *Pindarick Ode to the*

[55] Arthur Maynwaring, or Mainwaring (1668–1712), an Oxford and Inner Temple student, was in his earlier years an effective Tory writer, but afterwards, through his friendship with Lord Somers, became a Whig. To him Steele dedicated the first volume of the *Tatler.* He wrote much in the *Medley,* and was the center of a group of Whig pamphleteers which included Oldmixon and Robert Walpole. He was a member of the Kit Cat club, and while in France after the peace of Ryswick met Boileau and LaFontaine. Dennis refers to him in the *Original Letters,* p. 4; p. 85.

[56] Walter Moyle (1671–1721), was also an Oxford student who, as one of the circle at Will's, was generously praised by Dryden and other members of the company, especially by Charles Gildon. He was a classical scholar of some ability and a political pamphleteer. About the beginning of the eighteenth century he left London and seems never to have revisited it. In the *Original Letters,* p. 159, Dennis includes an invitation to him to spend some time with his old companions.

[57] *Works,* II, 502.

King, written in 1691 to his panegyric on the accession of George I. Some of the contemporary political events, such as the naval victory at LaHogue in 1692 and the death of Queen Mary two years later, evoked verses from Dennis. He did not, however, ally himself closely with either political party; and it is evident that during these years his ideal patron was a Maecenas, one interested in letters for themselves.[58] It was, indeed, to those whom he regarded as thus disposed that he made his first appeal. It is decidedly significant that his first dedication, that of his *Poems in Burlesque,* should have been addressed to the scapegoat wit and courtier Fleetwood Sheppard, or Shepherd, as Dennis spelled the name, who for many years had posed as a patron of letters.[59]

What success Shepherd had gained had been due in large measure to his relations with the Earl of Dorset, a man of no very high moral sense, a wit and courtier, a man about town, much of a politician, and a patron of poets. We have already noticed his generosity to Dryden, who had dedicated to him the *Essay on Satire* and that *Of Dramatic Poesy.* Wycherley and Butler knew his munificence, and Prior praised him highly. Possibly, as in the case of Prior, Shepherd introduced Dennis to Dorset, to whom in 1693 our author addressed his second dedication, that of *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose.* Dennis maintained his position with Dorset so well that the latter's son became one of the few benefactors of his old age, and that too in spite of the fact that in 1697 when Robert, Earl of Sunderland, succeeded his patron as Lord Chamberlain our author dedicated to the new favorite his *Plot and No Plot.*

Among the protégées of Dorset was Lord Halifax,[60] who,

[58] "After Mecoenas and Cardinal Richelieu your Lordship [Dorset] will stand eternally recorded by Fame, as the last in succession of this illustrious Triumvirate, and it will also stand recorded by that same everlasting Register, That in your Lordship's time, England had more good Poets, than it could boast from the Conquest to you before." *Dedication* to the *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* 1693.

[59] Rymer dedicated to Shepherd his *Tragedies of the Last Age.*

[60] The following stories from the *Life of Mr. John Dennis,* 1734, p. 24, which probably contain some apocryphal elements, are typical of a large number that have gathered around the critic's name: ". . . at his first introduction into that Nobleman's [Halifax's] Acquaintance an Accident

according to Dennis, "received more dedications than any other man of his time." He proved the lifelong friend and benefactor of the critic. The Earl of Pembroke must also be mentioned among Dennis's friends as one who remembered him both when he was prosperous and after he fell into want.[61] Dennis also gained the favor of another munificent patron of letters, the Duke of Ormond,[62] to whom Dryden had addressed his Plutarch. The Duke, who rather courted the writers of the day, graciously accepted the dedication of Dennis's play *Rinaldo and Armida.* Buckingham and Lansdowne, too, received his work favorably: the former was pleased with his play *Rinaldo and Armida* and was chosen as the patron for his chief critical work, the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 1701. The latter, by introducing Dennis to Godolphin, secured for the critic the only office he ever held.

The only definitely known amount that Dennis received from a patron was one hundred guineas for his play *Iphigenia.*[63] Of all his patrons Lord Lansdowne was perhaps the most liberal,

happened that might have lost the Favour of another not so well able to discern his merit as My Lord Halifax, for having been invited to Supper, and getting much intoxicated with some fine Wines, he had not often been used to, he grew so impatient of all contradiction, that he got up of a sudden, and left the Room, but at his Exit, overturned the whole Sideboard of Plates and Glasses.

"The next morning, seeing Walter Moyle, who was one of the Company, he told him that he had quite forgotten what had happened, for he was very much in liquor, and desired that he would tell him in what manner he went away. 'Why, Sir,' said Mr. Moyle, 'you went away like the Devil, and took one corner of the House with you.'

"Being another time at the same Nobleman's House, my Lord having a very fine Parrot he was very fond of, and happening to turn toward Poll, to stroke and play with him, Mr. Dennis got up on a sudden, 'I see,' said he, 'your Lordship is engaged, I will wait on you another time,' and before my Lord could make any Answer was got to the Door."

It is noteworthy that all the stories about Dennis, of which there is a fairly large group, emphasize his impetuousness.

[61] *Gentleman's Magazine* (1795), Vol. LXV, Pt. 1, pp. 105–106.

[62] Among those receiving his benefactions were Congreve, Addison, Newton, Locke, and Prior. Pope in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,* ll. 231–248, bitterly denounced his patronage.

[63] *Life of Mr. John Dennis,* p. 21.

for Dennis himself wrote[64] that this peer once made him "a Present so noble as never to have been made by any Subject to any Author now living." It seems impossible to determine when this present was bestowed, or what was its amount. Possibly Dennis's statement as to its munificence is an exaggeration, for his lively gratitude usually prevented him from underestimating the benefactions he received. It seems probable, however, that these benefactions were not frequent, and that of themselves they would have afforded a very precarious living for a gentleman about town.

Regarding Dennis's life at this time most of our scanty information is derived from his *Letters upon Several Occasions*, 1696. From them we learn that he was out of town a great deal,[65] that much of the time he was not in good health,[66] and that in 1695 he was "wracked by a cruel Passion" of love.[67] The object of his affection was a Northamptonshire woman, whose father disapproved of the proposed match. Wycherley, whom our author chose as his confidant in this affair, railed at him good naturedly and wrote that he was pleased when, about the last of March, 1695, Dennis announced his recovery from the passion.[68] By the following August our

[64] *Original Letters*, p. 86.

[65] Few of Dennis's out of town letters give any idea as to his whereabouts. On January 10, 1793/4, however, he wrote to Dryden from Busby Heath (*Letters upon Several Occasions*, p. 46). At the beginning of the next winter he was again out of town (*ibid.*, p. 24) and probably remained away till spring (*ibid.*, p. 32). Possibly it was at this time that he spent a month in Northamptonshire (*ibid.*, p. 34). He was back in the city during the summer (*ibid.*, p. 99) but had left by October and was again out of town at the time of the publication of his *Remarks on Prince Arthur* (prefatory note) in 1696. Dennis manifested a Londoner's usual regard for his native city, which he declared "is the only true and solid Foundation of the English Strength" (*Original Letters*, p. 262); but for many years he was led by his love of the country to spend at least a few weeks there (*ibid.*, p. 147).

[66] *Original Letters*, p. 24; p. 55. *Letters upon Several Occasions*, p. 17.

[67] *Letters upon Several Occasions*, pp. 34 ff.

[68] *Letters upon Several Occasions*, pp. 31 ff. While these letters are unsigned, it is fairly certain from their position in the collection and from their nature, together with Dryden's remark (Dennis's *Works*, I, 502)

author had regained his spirits sufficiently to be flattered by Congreve's favorable mention of him to a woman acquaintance.[69]

This collection of letters (which supplies most of the information just given concerning Dennis) illustrates well how our author followed the literary fashions of the time. The letter had become a popular form in France, largely through the genius of Voiture, and in England had found its best representative of the century in Howell. As a vehicle for gallantry, entertainment, literary gossip, biography, criticism, politics, and religion, it was much in vogue. Such collections as Tom Brown's *Letters from the Dead to the Living* and the correspondence of the rake Rochester passed through frequent editions. It is not surprising, therefore, that as one of his earliest ventures Dennis should have published in 1696 a small volume of correspondence between himself and some of the more prominent members of the group at Will's.[70] In these

that they are autobiographic. It is not known whether Pope alludes to this affair in the lines to Cromwell, July 12 or 13 (1707):

"And for a butcher's well-fed daughter
Great D—s roared like ox at slaughter."

[69] Dennis remained through life unmarried. In Pope's *Works*, VIII, 237, n., however, is given the following story: "Lord Marchmont told Sir George Rose that he was once at Lord Bathurst's villa, near London, when a servant whispered something to Pope which disconcerted him so visibly, that Lord Bathurst inquired of the man what he said. The servant answered that a young gentleman with a sword had desired him to inform Mr. Pope, that he was waiting for him in an adjacent lane, and that his name was Dennis. The challenger was the son of the critic, who had come to avenge his father. Lord Bathurst went out to the swordsman in Pope's stead, and succeeded in pacifying him." To the present writer this story seems hightly improbable. It is possible, however, that Dennis may have had a natural son, though there is no further evidence at present to support such a belief.

[70] *Letters upon Several Occasions, Between Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherley, Mr. ——, Mr. Congreve, and Mr. Dennis. Published by Mr. Dennis, With a New Translation of Select Letters of Monsieur Voiture*, 1696. Advertised in the *Term Catalogues* for February, 1696. In 1700 Tom Brown republished the greater part of this volume of Dennis's in his *Familiar and Courtly Letters, made English, . . . by Mr. Dryden, T. Cheek Esq., Mr. Dennis . . . With Twelve Select Epistles out of Aristaenetus; . . . And a Collection of Letters of Friendship . . . written by Mr. Dryden, Mr.*

letters we find mixed with expressions of mutual admiration occasional pieces of valuable criticism, such as Congreve's discussion of the nature of humor; while the gossip of the coffee house is mingled with suggestive comments on writers contemporary and classic. At the close of this body of correspondence are printed the letters of Voiture which we noticed in discussing the relations of Dennis and Dryden.

These letters, however, were not Dennis's earliest published work. In the *Gentleman's Journal; or Monthly Miscellany* for May, 1692, appeared an imitation of the tenth ode of the second book of Horace, preceded by an editorial note to the effect that "the Ingenious Writer of this poem" had refused to permit the publication of his name. By June, however the poet had lost some of his coyness and was prevailed upon to allow the following editorial preface to the poem *Upon Our Victory at Sea:*

"With much difficulty I have prevailed upon the Ingenious Gentleman who wrote it [*Upon Our Victory*] to let you know to whom the World is oblig'd for so admirable a Piece. His name is *Mr. John Dennis.* And 'tis to him that you owe that beautiful Translation of the Ode to *Licinius* in my last."

To the October number of this same magazine Dennis contributed a translation of the eighth satire of Juvenal, just at the time Dryden was turning that Roman author into English.

While Dennis was making these first ventures in the *Gentleman's Journal,* he was also preparing to publish some of his poems in book form. Some time in 1692, probably late in the year, appeared his *Poems in Burlesque* with a "Dedication in Burlesque" to Fleetwood Shepherd, and the *Passion of Byblis, made English . . . by Mr. Dennis.* In so much as this translation from Ovid was not advertised till the 24th of No-

Wycherley, . . . and other hands. The *Term Catalogues* for February, 1702, announce *Familiar Letters to Persons of Honour and Quality by Monsieur Voiture; made English by Mr. Dryden, Mr. Congreve, Mr. Wycherley, and Mr. Dennis, and other hands; in Two Volumes in Octavo.* Nothing more is known of this collection. It was possibly simply a slightly changed edition of material already published. In 1735 appeared the *Works of Monsieur Voiture, Translated by the most eminent Hands, viz., Mr. Dryden, Mr. Dennis, Dr. Drake . . . Addressed to Miss Blount by Mr. Pope.* This volume, which reached a third edition in 1736, was published by Curll. For its history see Pope's *Works,* VIII, 253.

vember,[71] it seems probable that the *Poems in Burlesque* may claim priority among all Dennis's books and pamphlets. These two earliest books, we may note, illustrate respectively favorite contemporary types. The burlesque had been made so popular in France by Scarron that it had become the most prominent form of non-dramatic literature and for a time practically monopolized attention. Thence it had been brought to England, where Butler had used it in *Hudibras.*[72] It was but natural, therefore, that Dennis in his aspirations to be counted among the wits of the day should have adopted this form for what is possibly his first pamphlet, for book would be too dignified a term to apply to these twenty odd pages with their large type and broad margins. These half dozen poems in octosyllabics, of which the principal ones are entitled A *Day's Ramble in Covent Garden* and the *Story of Orpheus Burlesqu'd,* are filled with a broad humor and display an occasional coarseness.

The *Passion of Byblis,* which, it is barely possible, may have been issued earlier in 1692 than the *Poems in Burlesque,* also illustrates how Dennis adopted the prevailing literary modes. Translating from the classics was at this time a favorite exercise of literary men, with whom none of the ancients was more popular than was Ovid. Dryden published his translations from that author in 1694 and by his interest in the task must have stimulated Dennis in his similar employment. It is also noteworthy that Dryden did not attempt this particular poem, which was then one of the best known in Ovid. In the preface to his translation of this story Dennis criticized Oldham who had undertaken the same task, maintaining with some justness that his predecessor's masculine temper was not suited to translating a poem that "required neither Force nor Genius, but only a Tenderness of Soul." This quality Dennis endeavored to supply.

This same year (November 17, 1692) the imprimatur of

[71] *London Gazette.*

[72] Dennis always manifested the highest regard for *Hudibras,* which he was obviously imitating in these poems. Through his writings are scattered some fifty quotations from Butler's pages, which show a remarkable knowledge of that author.

Edward Bohun was prefixed to a volume by Dennis called *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose.* The title page bears the date of 1693.[73] The prose includes three letters written to a friend when Dennis was on the continent, and a translation of Boileau's speech upon his admission to the French Academy.[74] The variety of the verse included also helps to confirm the appropriateness of the title chosen for the book. Here are two or three patriotic poems, a few of gallantry, and some imitations and translations of Anacreon, Horace, and Boileau. But a good half of these poems are Fables, the majority of them in burlesque and bearing a moral in verse longer than the stories themselves. L'Estrange's *Fables* had appeared but a few months before, and LaFontaine was also growing in favor in England, so we are not surprised at Dennis's interest in this literary form. He deserves the credit of being one of the earliest English writers to assist in the revival of the fable, since in the date of publication, at least, his fables antedate those of Lady Winchilsea, for example, by nearly twenty

[73] Advertised in the *Term Catalogues* in June, 1693. In November, 1692, the *Term Catalogues* had announced "*Poems and Letters upon Several Occasions by Mr. Dennis, Octavo, D. Brown, at the Sign of the Swan and Bible.*" Possibly this is the title of a third volume issued by Dennis within these closing months of 1692. It seems much more probable, however, that this was simply another title for the *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* for that volume is not inaptly described by the title advertised. Futhermore, Brown actually published the *Miscellanies,* in octavo, and some of Dennis's other publications, such as his *Britannia Triumphans,* were twice noticed in the *Term Catalogues.* In 1697 appeared a second edition of the *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* bearing the metamorphosed title *Miscellany Poems, By Mr. Dennis: With Select Translations of Horace, Juvenal, Mons. Boileau's Epistles, Satyrs, and Aesop's Fables in Burlesque Verse. To which is added, The Passion of Byblis, With some Critical Reflections on Mr. Oldham, and his Writings, With Letters and Poems. The Second Edition with Large Additions.* The "Large Additions" consisted of the *Passion of Byblis,* which had previously been published separately and of some half dozen closely printed pages of notes and comments on Oldham's translation of the poem. This collection, with exactly the changed title just given, was, however, advertised in the *London Gazette,* June 15, 1696.

[74] Brown included this translation in the 1698 edition of his *Familiar Letters.*

years.[75] The preface of this volume is also of interest, for it shows that, while Dennis was translating Boileau's verses and speech, he was also absorbing that writer's critical ideas.

Two years later, in 1695,[76] Dennis's admiration for King William, which we have already noticed, found expression in the *Court of Death: a Pindarick Poem, dedicated to the Memory of her Most Sacred Majesty Queen Mary.* The poet here represents himself as carried to the court of "Grim Death, the Giant Terror," who declares that the only thing that can break William's "matchless spirit" is the death of the Queen, which is accordingly decreed. Evidently the dominant love for things reasonable was shocked by Dennis's "convulsive transports," for he defended himself in the preface against the "horrible extravagancies" which had been "so falsely and so unreasonably" laid to his charge.

Such charges, however, failed to weaken Dennis's admiration for the Pindaric, for in 1697 he published what is probably the "most enthusiastic" of all his poems—the *Nuptuals of Britain's Genius and Fame. A Pindarick Poem on the Peace.* The following lines, which begin this short effusion, will indicate all too plainly why these verses failed to bring either commendation or reward:

> "What divine Rapture shakes my Soul?
> What Fury rages in my Blood,
> And drives about the stormy Flood?
> What makes my sparkling Eye-balls rowl?
> See, see the Godess of the Lyre
> Descending in Tempestuous fire;
> Hence ye Profane, be gone, retire;"

[75] "The first six books of his [LaFontaine's] *Fables* were published in France in 1668, other parts appearing in 1671, 1678, 1679, and the twelve books in 1694. Their popularity in England is shown by a remark of Addison, who writing in 1711 in praise of fables, says that LaFontaine 'by this way of writing is come into vogue more than any other writer of our times.'" Reynolds's *Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea,* Chicago, 1903, cviii. These fables by Dennis, it may be noted, seem to invalidate Miss Reynolds's statement that Lady Winchilsea was "first in the field with a poetic form destined to great popularity in succeeding years." *Ibid.,* cxi.

[76] Advertised in the *London Gazette* for March 11, 1694/5. The second edition of this poem was advertised in the *Term Catalogues* in May, 1695.

Congreve, too, had celebrated in verse this peace of Ryswick, so that he came in for attack along with Dennis in the anonymous and almost negligible *Justice of the Peace, or a Vindication of Peace from Several Late Pamphlets Written by Mr. Congreve, Dennis, &c.*, 1697. This is a short poem in "doggerel verse," accusing Dennis and Congreve of an interest in irregular verse forms, both to the neglect of the needs of the country. Neither Congreve nor Dennis ever took any notice of this attack, if indeed they ever saw it.

Though the poems of this period[77] gained Dennis some fame[78] and more than one substantial present,[79] they brought a reward by no means adequate for his support. Sometimes they failed of any financial return: the *Court of Death,* for example, was, according to the author's own statement,[80] "almost the only poem in praise of the late Queen that received no reward from the Government." It is not strange, therefore, that during this period Dennis made three ventures as a playwright. In fact, living as he did in contact with the most successful dramatists of the time, it was almost inevitable that he should try his hand at a play.

Sometime in May, 1697,[81] his first play, A *Plot and No Plot, or Jacobite Cruelty, a Comedy* was acted at the Drury

[77] From the following passage in A *Comparison Between the Two Stages,* 1702, p. 38, it seems that Dennis also translated Horace's *Ars Poetica:* "... has he [the author of a *Trip to the Jubilee*] never read the Ars Poetica? That's strange; if he does not understand Latin, he may read it in English, done by my Lord Roscommon, Oldham, or if he does not understand good poetry, he may read it translated by Dennis, which is as uncouth, hobbling Verse as he can desire."

[78] *Letters upon Several Occasions,* p. 51.

[79] "For since it is plain that to the considerable detriment to my little affairs, I declar'd for the Government at a time when I had no Encouragement, nor any Prospect of receiving the least Return; I think I should prove the most foolish as well as the most ungrateful of men, if I could fall from my English Principles at a time when I have received repeated Encouragement from an Extraordinary Man whose Favour is sufficient to give Force and Fire to the most Spiritless." Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* 1696.

[80] Preface to *Liberty Asserted,* 1704.

[81] Advertised in the *London Gazette* for May 31, 1697.

Lane theatre.[82] It relates the story of a conspiring Jacobite guardian, caught by two wards who may not marry without his consent. Their love is, of course, successful. Possibly the conception of this drama arose, as Mr. Ward suggests,[83] from the discovery of the Assassination plot the previous year. Joe Haines, the actor, declared in the prolog which he wrote and delivered that the play was prepared in six weeks; and knowing Dennis's methods of composition, we may well believe the statement. The comedy was produced in May, at a time, says Dennis, when the heat was intolerable; and he adds that though the crowds were not so large as the customary winter ones, they were well pleased with the play. We must remember, however, that Dennis was always optimistic in reporting the receptions of his own dramas.

The history of A *Plot and No Plot* after its first performance is a brief one. In his reply to Congreve in 1699 Collier incidentally replied to Dennis, who had published a vindication of the stage, by declaring that this comedy "swears at length and is scandalously Smutty and Profane." The theatrical dictionaries of the eighteenth century[84] treat it as they do most of Dennis's plays, either simply mentioning the name and date (the latter not always correctly), or bestowing a few words of perfunctory praise. In April, 1746, the comedy was revived at Covent Garden.

Dennis's second play, *Rinaldo and Armida,* is certainly a curious one for a writer who fulminated against music as effeminating and against the spectacular as ignoble. In this drama, produced, probably in 1698,[85] at the Lincoln's-Inn-Fields,

[82] "Baldernoe—Penkethman; Bull Senior—Doggett; Bull Junior—Cibber; Belcil—Harland; Rumor—Haines; Sue Frowsy—Mr[s] Bullock; Frisket—Mrs. Kent; Celia—Mrs. Rogers." Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830,* Bath, 1832, II, 110.

[83] *History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne,* 2d ed., London, 1899, III, 295.

[84] *E. g.,* A *Companion to the Play House . . . Composed in the Form of a Dictionary,* London, 1764. *Vide sub* Dennis: John Edgerton: *Theatrical Remembrancer,* London, 1788, p. 123.

[85] The date of this play is open to question. Genest gives simply 1699 without month or day, following, in all probability, the date printed on the title page of the published version. The following advertisement in

Dennis has left us an interesting mixture of Venuses and Cupids, Shepherds and Nymphs, with enchanted palaces that rose to music.[86] With the exception of a single chorus, which was borrowed from Henry Purcell, the music, forming a considerable feature of the play, was written by John Eccles. Dennis took his plot from Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered,* much as Dryden in his *Prince Arthur* had closely copied from that same author his chief incident—the adventures of Rinaldo on Mount Olivet. Though the play created something of a stir among the theatre goers of the town, it failed and after a short run was withdrawn.

Early in December, 1699,[87] the managers of the Lincoln's-Inn-Fields produced Dennis's third play, *Iphigenia,* based on the *Iphigenia in Taurus* of Euripides. The story of that heroine was at this time a popular one for dramatic representation. Dennis shows that he was familiar with Racine's treatment[88] and in his preface mentions the dramatization of M. de la Grange, which had lately been "brought on the French stage." Speaking of his own play, Dennis went on to state that the audience was much better pleased with the fourth and fifth acts which he had made his own than with the second where he had left Euripides almost untouched. The

the *London Gazette* for December 22, 1698, indicates that the play had already been performed: "Rinaldo and Armida, a Tragedy as it is Acted at the Theatre in *Little-Lincoln's-Inn Fields.* Written by Mr. Dennis. Printed for Jacob Tonson in Gray's-Inn-Lane." This advertisement is practically a reproduction of the title page of the play. In Dennis's career as a dramatist there is no other instance of his producing more than one play in a season.

[86] "At last the old stagers moulded a piece of Pastry work of their own, and made kind of Lenten Feast with their Rinaldo and Armida; that surprised not only Drury-Lane, but indeed all the town. Nobody dreamed of an Opera there. . . . Well with this Vigary they tugged a while, and . . . not a Fop but ran to see the Celebrated Virgin . . . there she shined in the full Zodiac, the brightest Constellation there; 'twas a pleasant reflection all the time to see her scituated there among the Bulls, Capricorns, Sagittaries, and yet the Virgo still remain *intacta* . . . at last down goes Rinaldo's enchanted mountain; . . . and there is not so much as a Molehill seen on't." *Comparison Between the Two Stages,* 1702, p. 35.

[87] Advertised in the *London Gazette* for January 1, 1699/1700.

[88] Dennis's *Works,* II, 409.

play was well staged and well acted and had also the zealous support of Colonel Codrington,[89] who wrote the epilogue.[90] Dennis thought that the first representation was as successful as he might reasonably expect. He was pleased, he says in the preface, with the close attention and profound silence; and he added naïvely, " . . . there was something like what happened at the representation of Pecuvius, his Tragedy. For when *Orestes* discovered his passion for *Iphigenia* in the fourth act there ran a general murmur through the Pit, which is what I had never seen before." "The critics, however, after allowing themselves to be pleased by Nature," he continues, "began to study how to be displeased by Art" and censured the drama severely. From the manager's standpoint the play was a decided failure, for it probably did not pay the expenses of staging, and after six performances it was withdrawn.[91] Following closely upon this play came one by Boyer,[92] based upon Racine's treatment of the Iphigenia in

[89] Christopher Codrington (1668–1710), an Oxford student and later a soldier, gained something of a name about town in the last decade of the seventeenth century as a wit and a courtier. He received dedications from Dennis, Creech, and others and took part in the replies to Blackmore's *Satire against Wit*, 1700. In 1697 he was made governor of the Leeward Islands. Six years later he resigned his appointment and spent the remainder of his life in retirement on his estate in the Barbadoes.

[90] "His Intimate Friend, Colonel Codrington, Governor of the Leeward Islands, having taken a great deal of Pains to support his Interest, at the Representation, not only by writing the Epilogue to it, but by encouraging all his Friends to take Tickets for the Poet's Night, Mr. Dennis thought himself obliged, as he had been really his Patron, to make a publick Acknowledgment of it, but when he told the Colonel of his Intentions, he would by no means consent to it, telling him that after what he had done, it would be thought by everybody that he had courted the Dedication: but that the Author might not imagine that he did it to save the Present, which is usually made on these Occasions, he forced (undoubtedly without any great Violence) an hundred Guineas upon him." *Life of Mr. John Dennis*, p. 20. Possibly Dennis managed to kill two birds with one stone, for when the play appeared in print, it was dedicated to Mr. John Freeman.

[91] The criticism of this play in A *Comparison Between the Two Stages*, p. 181, which emphasized Dennis's fondness for the word "tremendous," gave the town an epithet which was applied to our author throughout his life.

[92] Abel Boyer (1667–1729) was born of Huguenot parents in Castres in

'Aulis. The ill success of this drama—it seems to have fared worse than Dennis's—caused its author to say some harsh things in his preface about the "Giant Wit and Giant Critic," whose tiresome play had deterred people from attending a far better one, which differed from the former "no less than a young, airy Virgin from a stale and antiquated Maid." *Iphigenia* was the last of Dennis's dramas produced in the seventeenth century, all of which, we may note in summary, had proved ephemeral. Though he was beginning to gain a name as an unsuccessful playwright and at times was advised to stick to his criticism,[93] he had enjoyed a sufficient success to induce managers still to give respectful attention to whatever dramas he might bring them.

Dennis's earlier plays, however, very deservedly contributed less to his reputation than did his critical writings of this same period. In 1693 appeared his first venture in criticism, bearing the significant title the *Impartial Critick*,[94] which was a reply to Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*. Both of these books were published early in 1693, that by Dennis probably a week before his *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose*.[95]

The day has long passed when we can accept the characterization of Rymer as the worst critic that ever lived without asking what were his beliefs, and how he was regarded by his contemporaries. In his time Rymer was considered a leading critic,[96] and to us he is important both as one of our earlier

Upper Languedoc. In 1692 he became tutor to Allen Bathurst, afterwards Lord Bathurst. Boyer's best claim to general remembrance is his *Dictionnaire Royal François et Anglois*, published at the Hague in 1702; but his monthly collection of events known as the *Political State* is valuable to all students of the period, and he was one of the most influential of the Whig journalists. Later he quarrelel with Swift, and he was also given a place in the *Dunciad*.

[93] A *Comparison Between the Two Stages*, p. 181.

[94] The *Impartial Critick, or Some Observations upon A Short view of tragedy, written by Mr. Rymer*, London, 1693.

[95] The *Impartial Critick* was advertised in the *London Gazette* for February 27, 1692/3. At the close of the book appeared the following notice: "Miscellany Poems &c By Mr. Dennis, will be published this next week. Printed by James Knapton, at the Crown in St. Paul's Church Yard."

[96] Even Dryden, who might well have been prejudiced against his successor as historiographer, praised him highly in the very "Heads" of an

critics and as one of the first and foremost advocates of the rules which prevailed in English criticism down to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In his *Short View of Tragedy* just mentioned Rymer advocated the introduction into the English drama of the chorus which had been used with some success by Racine in certain of his plays. The most interesting part of the book, however, is the examination, passage by passage, of *Othello, Julius Caesar,* and *Catiline.* The book aroused a good deal of discussion and comment and reached a third edition within five years.

Dennis's primary purpose in his prompt reply was to defend Shakespere; but unfortunately he stopped short of a discussion of *Othello* and *Julius Caesar,* promising that later he would show that "contrary to Mr. Rymer's assertion, Shakespere is a great genius." The *Impartial Critick* consists of an introductory letter to a friend and of five dialogues between two characters, Beaumont and Jack Freeman, the latter representing Dennis's views. Possibly Dennis chose this latter name as a compliment to the friend to whom he had dedicated his *Iphigenia.* The key note of the greater part of this reply is sounded in the introductory paragraph, where our critic declares that the Grecian climate, politics, religion, and social customs were so different from the English that it would be absurd to attempt to establish the Athenian drama in London.

Three years later, in 1696, Dennis probably published the *Letters on Milton and Congreve,* which Godwin mentions in his *Lives of Edward and John Phillips* (p. 292, n.). Unfortunately the book cannot be found in the British Museum, though it is given in the catalog. Some of the letters, possibly, are identical with those included by Dennis in 1721 in the *Proposals* for printing certain of his works which we shall notice later. We can only regret the loss of such letters written by the critic who was a close friend of Congreve and one of the first enthusiastic admirers of Milton.

In this same year, 1696, appeared the *Remarks on a Book, entitled Prince Arthur, an Heroic Poem, with some general*

answer prepared against him. Pope, too, commended him. Cf. Garnett's *Age of Dryden,* p. 152.

Critical Observations, and several New Remarks upon Virgil, which Mr. Gosse has characterized[97] as "the first English review of a book in a modern sense." Dryden had announced his intention of treating this subject of Arthur, but he was anticipated by Blackmore and attacked in the preface of this popular epic. Probably, then, Dennis was led to make his *Remarks* through his friendship for Dryden as well as through his life long opposition to what he felt was unmerited success. This reply, with its two hundred closely printed pages and its forty more of preface, constitutes Dennis's longest, though not his most important, work. Scattered through the criticism are several interesting observations on Vergil and a number of quotations from *Paradise Lost;* while for the diversion of the reader Dennis incorporated near the middle of the book a fragment of a drama *Hypollitus,* which he had imitated from Euripides. The most important part of the book is that section of the preface where Dennis outlines his unfulfilled design of discussing more at large the nature of poetry. Some of the ideas here suggested he elaborated five years later in his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry;* others he never discussed except incidentally.

The reception of Dennis's critique was very favorable.[98] Contrary to general statement, however, Blackmore did not take the criticism kindly, for while Dennis's discussion was entirely free from personalities and from any bitterness, it was keen. We are not surprised, therefore, that when Blackmore wrote his *Satire on Wit* in 1700 he referred to Dennis thus:

> "Those who will D—n—s melt, and hope to find
> A goodly mass of bullion left behind,
> Do, as the Hibernian wit, who, as 'tis told,
> Burnt his gilt feathers to collect the gold."

Dennis replied in the *Epigrams* published against Blackmore by Tom Brown;[99] but he and Blackmore held so many views in

[97] *History of Eighteenth Century Literature,* London, 1889, p. 394.

[98] Langbaine's *Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets,* 1698, p. 38.

[99] "The wits easily confederated against him [Blackmore], as Dryden whose favor they almost all courted was his professed enemy." Johnson's *Lives of the Poets,* ed. 1854, II, 253.

common on religion, politics, and poetry, that they afterwards became staunch friends, Blackmore declaring Dennis a greater critic than Boileau,[100] and Dennis ranking Blackmore's *Creation* with the writings of Lucretius.[101]

In the preface to *Prince Arthur* Blackmore had attacked the license of the drama, but his note of half friendly criticism was nothing to the blast which Jeremy Collier sounded two years later (1698) in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* Into the war which followed Dennis was drawn, probably in part through his friendship with Congreve who had been severely attacked; and his reply[102] is possibly the best of the numerous answers made to Collier. Most of those replying denied Collier's statements *in toto.* Dennis, however, recognized the flagrant abuses of the existing stage and felt that his fellow Cantabrigian was justified in attacking them. It was only when Collier assailed the stage itself that Dennis very sanely took issue with him.[103]

One of the first results of Dennis's reply, which seems to have escaped previous comment, was an indictment for libelling the government, a charge not without its grim humor as we recall his ardent and unremitting defense of the established succession:

"Tu. 29 Nov. 1698. Yesterday being the last day of the term, the grand jury of Middlesex presented Mr. Dennis, his book, called a Vindication of

[100] Preface to *Alfred,* 1723, ii. It may also be noted that Blackmore's name appeared in 1704 among the subscribers to Dennis's proposed *Criticism of our Most Celebrated English Poets deceas'd.*

[101] Quoted in the *British Poets,* XXVIII, 59. If it be urged that Dennis is here merely bestowing a friendly compliment, we may well reply that Addison characterized this same epic (339th *Spectator*) as "one of the most noble and useful productions of our English verse," and that Johnson declared in his life of Blackmore that "if that author had written nothing else, his *Creation* would have transmitted him to posterity among the first favourites of the English Muse."

[102] The *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion. Occasioned by a late book written by J. Collier.* London, 1698. This reply to Collier was reprinted in 1725.

[103] If Mr. Collier had attack'd the corruptions of the Stage, for my part I should have been so far from blaming him that I should publickly have returned him my thanks: for these abuses are so great and flagrant that there is a necessity to reform them. Introduction to the *Usefulness of the Stage.*

the Stage, in answer to Collier as a libel against the government, for asserting that the people of England are most prone to rebellion of any in the world, and always quarreling among themselves, if not diverted by plays, upon which the court ordered an indictment against him, and the Attorney general to prosecute him." [104]

The indictment was probably quashed,[105] for Dennis's political adversaries, in their later blasts and counterblasts, would certainly have made capital of his conviction as an enemy to the government. Collier himself seems to have made no response to Dennis beyond noting the smuttiness and profanity of A *Plot and No Plot.* Dennis, however, continued the conflict by answering in 1705 Collier's *Dissuasive from the Play House* with a small pamphlet entitled A *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier's Letter.*[106] Twenty-five years later, he was drawn into a similar conflict with Law, the mystic.

In closing the account of this section of Dennis's life we may note that on the whole his lot was a fairly comfortable one. While he had been far from rich, he had not only been free from want but had been in a position to mingle with the wits and gentlemen of the town. In politics he was known as a strong but thoroughly independent Whig, on good terms with some of the most prominent members of the party. Though he gained a name for brusqueness and a certain testiness of temper, he entered upon no serious quarrels but lived on peaceable terms with his contemporaries and was respected by them. He had identified himself with the admirers of Dryden and had come to place that literary dictator "at the head of [his] small circle of friends." He had produced three plays which had met with indifferent success, had gained a name as a writer of Pindarics, and had published some of the best criticism produced in the last decade of the seventeenth century. To his contemporaries he seemed a man of decided promise.

[104] Luttrell, *Brief historical relation of State Affairs from Sept. 1678–April 1714,* Oxford, 1857, IV, 456.

[105] Possibly the following allusion in the *Critical Specimen* (p. 12) humorously exaggerates the event: "How the Critic was taken for a Plotter, and his being discharged as not Guilty, upon a diligent search of all his Papers."

[106] In this connection, too, may be mentioned Defoe's poem, the *Pacificator,* which deals with this controversy and has slight hits at Dennis.

II

1700–1710

By the year 1700, which marks the death of Dryden, Dennis had come to be regarded as one of the foremost among the men of letters of that rather barren period of our literature. Within the next ten years he produced the bulk of his most important work. The earlier years of this decade were especially busy ones for him, and he turned rapidly from one form of composition to another. To prepare five plays in a little more than the same number of years would seem to most men a sufficient task of itself; but Dennis found time not only for these but also for a number of long poems on the great contemporary national events, each in itself an extended and, as he himself confessed, an exhausting labor. To these must be added his three or four political pamphlets, of which at least one shows much care in the collecting of material. But with far the greatest labor he produced in these years three long critical discussions, which must have made severe demands upon him, for in their composition Dennis was not only exploring, as he felt, a *terra incognita,* but he was also using every device at his command for making clear his argument. Such conscientious and unremitting toil as he endured at this time certainly deserved its reward, so we are glad to record that the reception of his writings in this period was in general favorable: his poems gained him recognition from the government; some of his acute and just political tracts were widely read; and though most of his plays were damned, one at least made a hit. Most important of all, his critical writings were deservedly recognized by his contemporaries as among the most valuable produced in England during the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Regarding his private life of these years, the principal event to be noted is that while suffering in body,[1] Dennis was

[1] Preface to *Britannia Triumphans,* 1704.

lightened in spirits by his appointment in 1705 as one of the royal waiters in the London Custom House. This small sinecure, which paid £ 52 per annum,[2] was obtained through the intercession of Buckingham with Marlborough and Godolphin, whose attention was directed by him to Dennis's recently published poem on the battle of Blenheim. There was a delay between the promise of reward and its fulfillment, which drew a tactful reminder from the poet to Marlborough;[3] but finally, on the sixth of June, 1705, came the appointment by royal sign manual warrant. Dennis held this waitership for about ten years, being reappointed after the accession of George I by a royal sign manual warrant dated March 17, 1714. We shall notice later his disposal of the office.

Of his friends and associates during these ten years we possess little definite information. He lived on peaceable terms with Congreve and Wycherley, Addison and Steele, retained the interest of Buckingham, Lansdowne, and Halifax,[4] and gained the patronage of Anthony Henley[5] and of William, Duke of Devonshire. To the peer last named, whose vocation was politics, and whose avocations were cock fighting, horse racing, and letters, Dennis addressed the *Monument,* his poem on the death of King William. The author's statement that he had "long desired to lay something at his Grace's feet," but that he had been held in awe by his patron's discernment, is no mere compliment, for Devonshire was a good scholar with a taste that justified Lord Roscommon in entrusting his poems to him for correction. To Henley, his other new patron of these years, who is to be remembered as the companion of Dorset and Sunderland, as well as the

[2] It has sometimes been stated that this office yielded £120 per annum. See, however, *infra,* p. —, n.

[3] *Original Letters,* p. 26. In the fourth volume of Cibber's *Lives of the Poets,* p. 215, occurs the statement, based upon the authority of a Mr. Coxeter, that Marlborough gave Dennis a reward of one hundred guineas for his poem on the battle of Blenheim. Such a gift, however, would certainly have been unusual for the avaritious Marlborough.

[4] *Original Letters,* pp. 106, 363.

[5] Henley was one of the first of the Whigs to recognize Swift after the publication of the *Tale of a Tub.* The Purcells also received his patronage, and to him Garth dedicated the *Dispensary.*

benefactor of Addison, Dennis dedicated his most successful play, *Liberty Asserted.* The author states in the preface that the hint for the play came from Henley, "whom [he] had sometimes had the honour to hear talk of criticism;" and he adds that the success of the drama would have been greater, if he might have written under his patron's direction, a bit of praise that was doubtless pleasing to this free handed benefactor of poets, who received so many "soft dedications."

But the list of new friends and associates is not a long one, for by the time of his appointment to the sinecure Dennis had not only ceased striving to be known as a man of the town, but had even "retired from the world." The cause of such a step is hard to conjecture, especially as it came at the time of his recognition by the government and of his greatest success as a playwright. The passage throwing most light upon this affair appears in a letter dated August 6, 1720, and addressed to the Reverend Mr. Mansell, concerning some business trouble between Dennis and his brother-in-law, in which the latter accuses the former of acting unjustly:[6]

"I was till five and forty plung'd in the Conversation of the great World, and was every Day in Company with Gentlemen, who are universally known to be Men of no ordinary Merit, who wanted no Discernment to know me, and who have several of them given in publick proofs of their Esteem for me. Now if I mistake not, before the age of forty five the Manners of Men are unalterably formed. For these last fifteen Years I have retir'd from the World, and confin'd my Conversation to 3 or 4 of my old Acquaintance who are publickly known to be men of Honour and Understanding. Can any reasonable Man believe that I, who while I was conversant with the World kept my Reputation clear, should be a Villain in Solitude?"

By "retiring from the world," however, Dennis did not mean to imply that he had severed all connection with the republic of letters; for at the time he wrote the above lines, he was engaged in one of his bitterest literary quarrels. It was rather that the old generation of men about town was giving place to a younger set, and that Dennis in passing the half century mark was then ready for the quieter life of an old man. It is difficult always to maintain a just perspective of his life, for he was thirty-five before he published anything

[6] *Original Letters,* p. 46.

and fifty-five before he engaged in the first of the many fierce broils by which he is commonly remembered.

One of the old friends with whom he maintained relations after this retirement was Charles Gildon, who later gave the following hint of their customary life:[7]

"Your letters have of late been full of complaints that you can never find me at home; and that you every day miss me at our usual place of Rendezvous, where we so frequently, with no vulgar pleasure, offer our modest libations to Bacchus amidst our more plentiful sacrifices to Appolo."

There were, however, other and more serious demands upon Dennis's resources; for though the early biographies furnish no material for surmising their nature, beyond a few vague hints at extravagance, his expenditures exceeded his income. Possibly a statement in one of his letters[8] that his purse had always been open to the needs of his friends may help in accounting for the disappearance of the estate of the critic who prided himself on his contempt for money matters. Whatever be the true explanation, about six years after his appointment to the waitership, Dennis complained[9] that Pope had attacked him at a time "when all the world knew that he was persecuted by Fortune"; and this impecuniosity was doubtless the cause of his letter on urgent business to Steele,[10] who, it seems, neglected to answer. But speculation concerning these affairs with such a slender basis of fact is decidedly futile, so we may well pass to a consideration of such information with regard to Dennis's life as is conveyed by his writings.

In celebrating in verse the great national events of the time, especially the victories of Marlborough which were then thrilling and exalting the nation, Dennis was, of course, simply

[7] *Complete Art of Poetry*, 1718, iii.

[8] *Original Letters*, p. 46.

[9] Preface to the *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism*, 1711.

[10] In July, 1710, Dennis wrote thus to Steele: "I sent a Letter on the 28th to your House, Directed to Captain *Steele*, and desiring to see him that Night, that I might have his Advice upon Business of Importance, softly intimating at the same Time, that it was not in my Power to wait on him. But having neither seen him nor heard from him, I fancy that my old Friend is departed, and some other Gentleman has succeeded him in the old House, with the same Name, and with the same Martial Title." *Original Letters*, p. 28.

following the custom of the poets and poetasters of the day. He recognized what an aid to preferment good occasional poems might prove, and in this decade he took advantage of these important events to exercise his "genius for the Pindarick." In 1702 he published the earliest of his patriotic effusions of this period, the *Monument: A Poem sacred to the Immortal Memory of the Best and Greatest of Kings, William the Third.*[11] Its twelve or fifteen hundred lines of blank verse are a strange mixture of "transport" with serious argument to prove that William accomplished more through his love of liberty than Caesar did through ambition. The author was totally unconscious of any incongruity in his treatment, for he declared in the preface that he had "less mistrust" of these verses than of anything else he had "done in Poetry." Elsewhere[12] Dennis stated that the *Monument* brought him no reward, but that it gained him more fame than any of his previous poems.

Two years later, 1704,[13] he published a longer and more pretentious performance, *Brittania Triumphans; or, a Poem on the Battle of Blenheim,* which was dedicated to Queen Anne, for she had inspired it. Dennis had desired to write a poem on the battle, but had been uncertain what form it should take till the Queen proclaimed a general thanksgiving for the victory. He seized upon the hint thus suggested for combining poetry and religion and gave these verses laudatory of the Queen and Marlborough a setting of praise and rejoicing. Though Dennis's *Blenheim* contains, of course, no such passages as the famous one of the angel and the storm in Addison's description of the same battle, it ranks as one of the best of the numerous poems evoked by the victory.[14] These verses, which were generally regarded as his most successful,[15] brought him the greatest reward he ever received, for

[11] Advertised in the *Term Catalogues* for June, 1702.

[12] Preface to *Liberty Asserted,* 1704.

[13] Advertised in the *Term Catalogues* for November, 1704.

[14] Of the other poems upon this battle two of the best known are those by Prior and by John Philips, neither of which is noteworthy. See also Macaulay's Essay on *Addison, Works* (New York, 1860), V, 354.

[15] Giles Jacob, the *Poetical Register: or the Lives and Characters of all our English Poets. With an Account of their Writings,* London, 1723, II,

Marlborough possibly gave him a hundred guineas[16] and was partly responsible for Halifax's securing for him the waitership.[17]

Encouraged by such substantial recognition, Dennis composed in 1707 his longest and most pretentious verses, A *Poem on the Battle of Ramillies. In Five Books.* The plan of this poem was, as he himself perceived, decidedly daring; for the powers of Satan and Discord are here represented as conspiring for the French against Marlborough. Heaven itself holds a council and sends the Angel of Concord, who protects him from all that is bad and thus brings victory to the English. Dennis was now profiting from his admiration for Milton, for this long and somewhat tiresome effusion was an obvious though not very successful imitation of *Paradise Lost.*

From time to time through these years Dennis contributed some slight verses to the contemporary ephemeral publications, the most notable apearing in the *Muses Mercury* which struggled along through the year 1707 under the editorship of John Oldmixon. In 1698, Dennis had written a prologue for Oldmixon's *Amyntas, a Pastoral,* and during the following years the two had remained good friends, so Dennis was naturally asked to contribute to this new publication. In the January number of this magazine he printed his *Prologue for the Subscribers to Julius Caesar, Supposed to be spoken by Shakespere,* which was written for the performances supported by Halifax.[18] To the April issue he contributed a *Song—Till*

"'Lord Halifax proposed a subscription for reviving 3 plays of the best authors with the full strength of the Company; and by his influence it was soon completed—each subscriber was to have 3 Tickets for the first day of each play upon his single payment of 3 Guineas (Cibber.)'" Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage,* II, 363.

260. Also Ayre, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Alexander Pope Esquire,* London, 1745, I, 51.

[16] Cibber's *Lives of the Poets,* IV, 216. But the account of Dennis there given is in some other respects untrustworthy, so we may question this statement till it is supported by some further evidence.

[17] Possibly Dennis's success at this time with his play *Liberty Asserted* may also have influenced Godolphin.

[18] "Jan. 14. For the encouragement of the Comedians acting in the Hay., and to enable them to keep the diversion of plays under a separate interest from the operas . . . By Subscription . . . with a new Prologue.

death I Sylvia shall adore, which shows a lighter touch than does most of his verse. The following year, 1708, the *Oxford and Cambridge Miscellanies* contained the *Character of a True Friend,* another of his short pieces, which, though revealing something of the writer's tastes and ideals, is quite valueless as poetry.

Dennis also busied himself with a few translations, to illustrate in practice his belief in the advantages to be derived from a union of poetry and religion, a doctrine which he strongly advocated during these years. Such a poem is his paraphrase of the *Te Deum* of St. Ambrose, which appeared in his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 1701, where he formally promulgated his doctrine. This version of St. Ambrose's famous hymn, which became fairly popular, was given a prominent place in a *Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems*[19] in 1709 and was also later included in Dennis's *Works.* As further practical exemplifications of his theory Dennis produced in these years his blank verse version of the eighteenth Psalm and a short paraphrase from Habakkuk, both of which first appeared in the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* 1704.

While busy with these poems, Dennis was also writing for the stage. Though he had stated and restated that his chief purpose in writing his plays was to fan the fires of liberty, he had also declared that the drama was the single field of letters offering a livelihood to a poet; and as his needs pressed harder and harder upon him, he grew more and more solicitous about the receipts of the third night. His first play of the eighteenth century, produced some time in 1702, was the *Comical Gallant; or the Amours of Sir John Falstaff,*[20] an alteration of the *Merry Wives of Windsor.* Revising Shaks-

[19] A *Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems upon Several Occasions, By the E. of Roscommon, Mr. Dryden, Mr. Dennis, Mr. Norris, Mrs. Kath. Phillips, Philomela, and others,* London, 1709. This volume was reprinted in 1719.

[20] The *Comical Gallant; or the Amours of Sir John Falstaff. A Comedy as it is Acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane by his Majesty's Servants By Mr. Dennis To which is Added a Large Account of the Taste in Poetry, and the Causes of the Degeneracy of it,* London, 1702.

pere's plays was at this time a very popular practice among dramatists: in 1700 Dennis's friend Gildon had met with some small success in altering *Measure for Measure;* and the next year Lord Lansdowne, one of our author's patrons, produced an adaptation of the *Merchant of Venice.*[21] Urged by the example of these friends, Dennis revised the *Merry Wives of Windsor,* which, he tells us, had been extremely popular in the reign of Charles II.[22] He believed the play capable of improvement, for he considered the plot irregular and the style stiff and harsh, though he excused these faults on the ground that in writing so hastily[23] Shakspere had done all that any man could do. In his alterations Dennis attempted to reduce this play to a sweet reasonableness by polishing and refining about a half of the dialogue and by making every thing in the plot instrumental to Fenton's marriage. This adaptation, however, fared worse than almost any other play by Dennis, who explained its failure thus:[24]

"Falstaff's part, which you know to be a principal one in the play, and that on which almost all the rest depends, was by no means acted to the

[21] The following list of alterations of Shakespere from 1700–1703 is given in Professor Lounsbury's *Shakespere as a Dramatic Artist,* N. Y., 1901, p. 302:

King Henry IV, Part I, by Betterton, 1700.

King Henry IV, Part II, by Betterton (not published till 1719).

King Richard III, by Colley Cibber, 1700.

Measure for Measure, or Beauty the Best Advocate, by Gildon, 1700.

The Jew of Venice [The Merchant of Venice] by George Granville [Lord Lansdowne], 1701.

The *Comical Gallant; or the Amours of Sir John Falstaff,* by Dennis, 1702.

Love Betrayed, or the Agreeable Disappointment [Twelfth Night], by Burnaby, 1703.

[22] ". . . in the reign of King Charles the Second, those men of extraordinary parts, as the late Duke of Buckingham, my Lord Normanby, my Lord Dorset, my late Lord Rochester, Sir Charles Sedley, Dr. Frazer, Mr. Savil, Mr. Buckley, were in love with the Beauties of this Comedy." Preface to the *Comical Gallant.*

[23] "John Dennis first mentioned in print the story of Queen Elizabeth's having commanded Shakspere to write this comedy." Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature,* 1899, II, 137.

[24] Preface to the *Comical Gallant.*

satisfaction of the audience;[25] upon which several fell from disliking the Action into disliking the Play, which will always be very natural upon such occasions, though sometimes not very reasonable, and divers Objections were made, which if the Play had succeeded had perhaps never been thought of."

In May of the same year, 1702, Dennis published the play with a preface to Granville and a prefatory essay entitled A *Large Account of the Taste in Poetry and the Causes of the Degeneracy of It.* This preface, with its thoughtful comparison of contemporary conditions affecting taste with those of the reign of Charles II, is especially interesting as revealing how closely Dennis was watching the currents of national life.

Such a record of total or partial failures would have discouraged most dramatists; but Dennis was made of other stuff, so on February 24, 1704, he made his fifth venture with his tragedy *Liberty Asserted*[26] and succeeded. The popularity of this play was due in large measure to its abuse of the French.[27] The war of the Spanish Succession had been wear-

[25] In the *Apology for his Life,* 1740, Cibber suggests that Bullock was the offending actor. Bellchamber expresses a doubt in his note at this point whether "Bullock's position would entitle him to play that part in 1702." Genest suggests (II, 250) that Powell was the delinquent.

[26] *Liberty Asserted: a Tragedy, as it was acted in the New Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn-Felds,* London, 1704.

[27] Party feeling, which ran very high at this time, probably helped in the invention and circulation of two stories about Dennis which have shown remarkable vitality. One of these stories appeared in the *Life of Mr. John Dennis,* p. 23: "The author's fondness for this Play, together with the Success of it, if we may believe some of his sneering Enemies, who are for turning every thing of Importance into Ridicule, almost touched his Brain; for they gave out that he imagined the French King, Lewis the Fourteenth, was very much offended at it, that he would never make Peace with *England,* unless the delivering up of Mr. Dennis was one of the Articles of it. And that being once at a Gentleman's House near the Coasts of Sussex, as he was walking by the Seaside one morning, he 'spied a ship, making, as he thought, toward him, which he immediately apprehending to be a Privateer, he made his way to *London,* even in his Gown and Slippers, as he was, without taking leave of his Friend, whom he accus'd of a villainous Design of decoying him down to his House, that he might deliver him to the French."

The other story is given in Cibber's *Lives of the Poets* (1753), IV, 221:

ing along; and in spite of the brilliant achievements of Marlborough, there was growing through England a strong sentiment for peace, compelling the Whigs to seize every opportunity for keeping alive the national prejudice against the French. Consequently they were willing and ready to applaud a tragedy which showed one of the enemy's generals in Canada denouncing Louis as a tyrant and setting up a kingdom friendly to the English. Dennis protested in his preface that this tragedy was not a whig but an English play and in support of his statement included in the published version a last scene of exhortation to "stronger public spiritedness," which, on account of the length of the drama, had been omitted in the acting. The attitude of the play, however, is whiggish; and the hint for its composition came from that very good partisan Anthony Henley, to whom Dennis addressed his dedication. The author also acknowledged his indebtedness for assistance from his friend Southerne and from Betterton, who acted one of the leading parts and was also instrumental in securing a very strong cast, which included Booth, Powell, Bowman, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Porter, and Mrs. Barry. The work of the actress last named so pleased the author that he took occasion in the preface to bestow upon her this special commendation:

"This play indeed received all the Grace and Ornament of Action in most of its principal Parts, and in all of the Women's. But that of Sakia

"... when the Peace was about to be ratified, Mr. Dennis, who certainly over-rated his importance, took it into his imagination, that when the terms of the peace should be stipulated, some persons, who had been most active against the French, would be demanded by that nation as hostages; and he imagined himself of importance enough to be made choice of, but dreaded his being given up to the French as the greatest evil that could befall him. Under the influence of this strong delusion, he actually waited upon the Duke of Marlborough, and begged his Grace's interposition, that he might not be sacrificed to the French, for says he, 'I have always been their enemy.' To this very strange request, his Grace very gravely replied, 'Do not fear, Mr. Dennis, you shall not be given up to the French; I have been a greater enemy to them than you, and you see that I am not afraid of being sacrificed, nor am I in the least disturbed.' Mr. Dennis upon this retired, well satisfied with his Grace's answer."

Swift, too, gives the first of these stories in his *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, Scott's edition of his *Works*, IX, 238.

by Mrs. Barry was acted so admirably and so inimitably, as that no Stage in Europe can boast of any thing near her performance;"

This tragedy was published by Stratham and Lintot, the latter paying the former, on February 3, 1703/4, £ 7 s. 3 for a half share, and three weeks later purchasing the other half at the same price.[28] On May 2, 1707, the play was revived for Mrs. Porter's benefit; and Dennis took advantage of this occasion to send to his patron Godolphin a copy of this tragedy as "the first *British* play," that is, the first one acted after the confirmation of the Union with Scotland, in which his Lordship had been instrumental. Thirty-five years later, May 24, 1742, the play was again produced, this time at Covent Garden.

Dennis's greatest success was followed the next year by what was probably his worst failure, *Gibraltar, or the Spanish Adventure, a Comedy.* This play, which was staged a few months after the capture of the great fortress, portrays an intrigue of two British officers by which they win two senoritas from an avaricious and cowardly old uncle. Dennis himself realized that his treatment of the subject was not a very happy one, and he pleaded in excuse that he was too much exhausted by the long poem *Blenheim,* which he had just written, to produce "anything for the Stage like a Masterpiece."[29] Nor were the circumstances of the production of the play less unfortunate than those of its composition. After a series of delays and disastrous rehearsals *Gibraltar* was given at Drury Lane on the sixteenth of February, 1705, and met with a storm of hisses and cat calls.[30] Four days later appeared an alteration of the play which failed so decisively that it was at once withdrawn, thus losing for Dennis the returns of the third, or author's, night. Just what was the cause of this failure, which seems even more ignominious than the lack of merit in

[28] Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century,* London, 1814, VIII, 295.

[29] *Preface to Gibraltar.*

[30] The *Critical Specimen,* 1715, giving the outline of an imaginary life of Dennis, suggests as the heading of a chapter (p. 12), "Of the Bombardment of Gibraltar, and how several Chiefs engaged in that dreadful enterprise were, contrary to the laws of Arms, almost pelted to Death with Apples and Orange-Peel."

the play warranted, is hard to conjecture, even in the light of the following passage from Dennis's preface:

"This Play was so unfortunate as to find the Town out of Humor with it, whether it proceeded from the calamities which attended the Rehearsal, which were so numerous as had never befallen a play in my memory, or from the Malice and strange Prejudices with which many came prepossess'd. The first day it was well acted in most of its Parts, but was not suffer'd to be heard. The second day it was faintly and negligently acted, and consequently was not seen;"

Whatever may have been the cause,[81] the failure was so disastrous that when Dennis sent his biography for Jacob's *Poetical Register,* twenty years later, he omitted any mention of this comedy,[82] nor did he include it in his *Works.* Evidently the misfortunes of the play were long remembered, for in one of the pamphlets directed against Dennis in his war with Steele, about 1720, appeared the taunt,[83] "And pray let us know what was the reason we did not see your 'Gibraltar' printed with the rest of your Works," a query which Dennis ignored.

To this same busy year, 1705, Mr. Roberts, in his careful article on Dennis in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* attributes another mutilation of Shakspere. His statement reads thus: "In 1705 he brought out the 'Invader of his Country, or the Fatal Resentment,' founded on 'Coriolanus,' which languished at Drury-Lane for three or four nights." The present writer has not been able to discover any record of such performances either in Genest or elsewhere. The first reference he has found is the following, probably by Pope, in the *Narrative of Dr. R. Norris concerning the Frenzy of Mr. J. Dennis,* 1713:[84] "Mr. John Dennis has industriously caused it to be reported that I entered his room, *vi et armis,* either with a design to deprive him of life, or of a new play

[81] Later in the preface Dennis states that the play had been criticized on the ground that "the Character of this Comedy is low, and that there is neither very much Wit, nor Love, nor Gallantry in it."

[82] "In the Account this Gentleman sent he omitted, but for what Reason is unknown to us, a Play wrote by him, call'd *Gibraltar,* or *The Spanish Adventure;* a Comedy, acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane." Jacob's *Poetical Register, ed.* 1723, II, 286.

[83] The *Theatre,* II, 397.

[84] Pope's *Works,* X, 460.

called 'Coriolanus,' which he has had ready for the stage for four years." This passage indicates that Dennis's unsuccessful efforts to interest a manager in his adaptation were well known. It is also to be noted that near the close of the second decade of the century the *Invader* was produced at Drury-Lane by Steele, Booth, and Cibber, who would hardly have revived the play, if it had been already damned. Furthermore, though all of Dennis's other dramas were published soon after their production on the stage, the *Invader* did not appear in print till 1720, the year after its failure in performance at Drury-Lane. The next year, 1721, Dennis added it to the revised edition of his *Works,* which had been first published in 1717.

In February, 1707, Dennis printed in the *Muses Mercury* his masque of *Orpheus and Eurydice.* Though the myth here treated was a popular one with the dramatists of the early eighteenth century,[85] and this particular version was well set to music by Daniel Purcell, it is probable that the masque was never staged.[86]

Two years later, February 5, 1709,[87] Dennis brought out at Drury-Lane his last original play, *Appius and Virginia.* He began this tragedy, which deals with the well known story in the third book of Livy, in 1705, but he did not complete it beyond the fourth act before August, 1708.[88] Maynwaring,[89] who saw the play in manuscript, prophesied that it would be the best "Tragedy that had appeared these many years;" and

[85] *Orpheus and Eurydice, a Masque,* by Martin Bladen, 1705.

Orpheus and Eurydice, A Dramatic Entertainment of Dancing, Attempted in Imitation of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, by J. Weaver, Drury Lane, 1718.

Eurydice, a Tragedy, by Mr. Mallet, 1731.

[86] "Orpheus and Eurydice, a masque, with little merit and no success followed in 1709." Dibdin's *Complete History of the Stage,* 1800, IV, 359. The date here given is incorrect for the time of publication at least, while the statement of "no success" still leaves it doubtful whether the masque was ever performed.

[87] The published edition of the play is included in the *Term Catalogues* for Easter and Trinity, 1709.

[88] *Original Letters,* pp. 115, 131.

[89] *Supra.*

the actor Betterton, too, thought well of this "rough, manly play," in which he took what was probably his last original part.[40] These favorable expectations, however, were not realized, so after a run of four or five nights the tragedy was withdrawn.[41] At present the play is generally remembered in connection with the origin of the phrase "Stealing thunder,"[42] and as offering the place of first attack against its author by Pope in his *Essay on Criticism.* The following lines of that essay were all too obviously aimed at Dennis:

> ". . . Appius reddens at each word you speak,
> And stares tremendous with a threatening eye,
> Like some fierce giant in old tapistry."[43]

Dennis was, of course, furious, at this "attack upon [his] person" and replied in his *Reflections upon . . . an Essay on Criticism;* but the discussion of this conflict carries us beyond the bounds of the present section. After the failure of *Appius and Virginia* Dennis wrote no more plays, though he was still to see the unfortunate reception of the *Invader.* His record as a dramatist is not a happy one—six or seven semi or total failures and but one decided success—so it is a relief to turn to his work as a political pamphleteer, which deserves greater commendation.

[40] Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature,* 1899, III, 427.

[41] Nevertheless the play must have attained a certain popularity, or the shrewd Bernard Lintot would never have given £21 s.10 for it, which is the highest price Dennis is known to have received for any of his writings. Cf. Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century,* VIII, 295.

[42] "There is another and withal quite historical anecdote in connection with Appius and Virginia. It seems that the old way of producing artificial thunder and making mustard were identical, hence the reference in the Dunciad to the 'thunder rumbling from a mustard bowl.' But about the time in question, the thunder was 'more advantageously performed by troughs of wood with stops in them.' Dennis is usually credited with the improvement; and upon hearing thunder employed at a performance of Macbeth after his own play had been withdrawn, he caused a commotion in the theatre by denouncing the proceedings of the Managers, who, he alleged, stole his thunder but refused to act his plays." Wm. Roberts in the *Bookworm,* IV, 294.

[43] Pt. III, ll. 585 ff.

It was but natural that one so ready with his pen and possessed of such a strong interest in national affairs should have taken to writing political pamphlets, which, as the precursors of the modern newspaper editorial, were then issuing rapidly from the press. Such work was profitable to the writer both from the immediate return and from the prospect of political preferment which it offered. In the power of his pamphlets Dennis was, with all due respect to Swinburne,[44] far inferior to Swift; but he seems to have possessed greater intellectual honesty and a far less bitter partisanship. That Dennis wrote many political tracts which have perished seems possible both from the ephemeral nature of some of his pamphlets, such as the *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier,* and from the fate of his *Seamen's Case,* of which nothing is known beyond the fact that it is mentioned on the title page of the *Essay on the Navy* as by the same author. It seems probable both from the evidence just cited and from its style that the *Essay on the Navy,* which bears the earliest date of any of Dennis's extant tracts, 1702, was by no means his first venture as a pamphleteer.[45] Moreover, in the dedication of this tract to the Earl of Pembroke, Dennis alludes to the "Loss, Discouragement, and Misrepresentations that attended" his

[44] *St. James's Gazette,* November 8, 1895.

[45] An *Essay on the Navy, or England's Advantage and Safety prov'd Dependent on a Formidable and well-Disciplin'd Navy; and the Encrease and Encouragement of Seamen. In Two Parts.*

Part I. Demonstrating the Necessity of a Formidable Navy, what our *Naval Force* is in Number of Ships, their Names, Rates, Men, and Guns, the Manner of Manning the Navy; the Seamen's Treatment and Manner of Payment and therein divers Hardships that they suffer; the Prejudice accruing to the Government (and the Nation in general) thereby; as well as the late manner of Impressing; the Inconvenience thereof demonstrated &.

Part II. Containing an humble Proposal for removing the afore-mentioned *Grievances,* and giving due Encouragement to the Seamen: effectually manning the Navy at all times, in a few Days, and thereby saving the Government Three or Four Hundred Thousand Pounds *per Annum* in time of War, and be of no Charge, but rather save Monies in time of Peace. With a brief touch on Grenwich Hospital, for Encreasing the Revenues thereof.

By the Author of the Seamen's Case. London, 1702.

"previous Endeavours." Our regret that these pamphlets have perished is deepened by the broad knowledge of actual conditions displayed by Dennis in his *Essay on the Navy,* which with its unimpassioned recital of abuses on the English men of war, supported by scores of specific illustrations, portrays most vividly the corruption of the age. For a number of these existing abuses Dennis proposed, as had Defoe five years before, some very sane remedies, such as a less haphazard scheme for enlistment than by impressment, better and more regular pay for the common seamen, and improvements in caring for the sick. His large and kindly attitude in this pamphlet can but cause us to regret that he had apparently little influence with those in authority.

Though another of Dennis's tracts bears the same date as the *Essay on the Navy,* it seems probable that the latter appeared first, for the author would hardly have made complaint of the loss and discouragement mentioned in the preceding paragraph after the hearty reception accorded the *Danger of Priestcraft to Religion and Government: with some Politick Reasons for Toleration, Occasion'd by a Discourse of Mr. Sacheverel's intitul'd the Political Union & lately printed at Oxford. In a Letter to a New-Elected Member of Parliament.* Sacheverel, against whom this short treatise was directed, was, of course, the Oxford high church man and tory, whose trial, nearly a decade later, through the efforts of the whig ministry, was to result in their overthrow. Even at the beginning of the century he had gained a national reputation for fulminating against "low churchmen, dissenters, latitudinarians, and whigs" through such tracts as his *Character of a Low Churchman,* 1701, and his more intolerant *On the Association of Moderate Churchmen with Moderate Whigs and Fanatics.* Early in June he delivered a sermon on the *Political Union,*[46] in which he waved "the bloody flag and banner of defiance" against all who refused to gather under the high church standard. In its published form this sermon evoked two notable replies,—

[46] The *Political Union. A discourse shewing the dependence of Government on Religion in general: and of the English Monarchy on the Church of England in particular.*

Defoe's *Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and Dennis's *Danger of Priestcraft.* That the public interest in this latter pamphlet was widespread is substantiated by its assailant the Reverend Charles Leslie, who declared in the preface to his *New Association* that "the Price Three Pence is put on it [Dennis's tract] in a small Character, that it may run cheap among the Common People. . . . And accordingly this Pamphlet is so effectively dispers'd that few of the Fanatics or Common Wealth Men want it in their Pockets, to Recommend it everywhere." Dennis deserved all the popularity gained by his tract, for he had made an able and moderate reply to Sacheverel's bigotry and had argued with convincing reasonableness for a broader toleration as of particular advantage to the established government of England, especially after so much damage had been done the country by religious factions and by priestcraft. In striking contrast, too, with Dennis's plain and moderate argument is the "railing and abuse"[47] of the answer that soon appeared by the Reverend Charles Leslie.[48] Though Dennis afterwards returned to another phase of the same question, he took no notice of Leslie's reply; and Leslie, in his turn, soon practically forgot Dennis.

In 1703 our author published his next political tract, A *Proposal for Putting a Speedy End to the War, by Ruining the Commerce of the French and the Spaniards, and securing our own, without any additional Expense to the Nation.* Possibly he had in mind some difficulty in securing a publisher for this pamphlet, which had been written in 1700, when he alluded in the preface to the *Essay on the Navy* to the "misrepresentations and discouragements" he had encountered. The plan suggested for ruining the enemy's commerce was the equipment of a fleet of two hundred privateers, to be chosen from the English trading vessels, and to be fitted out and maintained by a small additional tariff on imports and exports. The

[47] *Daniel Defoe, His Life and Recently Discovered Writings,* by William Lee. London, 1869, I, 62.

[48] The *New Association of those called Moderate-Church-Men, with the Moderate-Whigs and Fanatics, to under-mine and blow-up the Present Church and Government, Occasion'd By a Late Pamphlet, Entituled, The Danger of Priestcraft &. By a True-Church-Man,* London, 1702.

unenthusiastic reception accorded this *Proposal* failed to shake Dennis's faith in its value; for a year or so later he declared in the preface to *Liberty Asserted* that had this plan been followed, there "had been no need of writing this tragedy" for arousing public spirit for the war. He even went so far, in 1706, as to send his patron Godolphin an abstract of this scheme, accompanied by a short letter ending thus:[49]

"I shall have the Honour to wait on your Lordship suddenly to know your Pleasure in this Affair. If your Lordship encourages me to lay this Proposal before the House of Commons, I shall prepare an Appendix, by which I believe that I can satisfy that Honourable House, that the Advantages mention'd both in the Proposal at large, and in the Abstract, will really accrue to us from putting this Design into Practice."

So far as is known Dennis received no encouragement, and he wrote no more political pamphlets till 1711. The most probable reason for his silence at a time when both parties were eagerly seeking pamphleteers, and might well have made use of such a virile author, is that given in the preface to *Liberty Asserted:*

"I am perfectly convinced that if I could be brought to espouse any Party warmly that Party might be brought to espouse me, but that till I make that step I must be left to myself; of this I am perfectly convinc'd, and yet nothwithstanding this Conviction, I hope in God that I shall not change my Conduct."

During this busy period of the earlier years of the century, Dennis also produced his longest and most important critical works and from them gained his most substantial reputation. In fact he stood as perhaps the most important critic of the period following the death of Dryden. Possibly Dennis's desire to occupy the seat of his master urged him at this time to his most original critical thinking; possibly his slowly ripening powers had now reached their maturity; certainly he was not distracted, as in the next decade, by personal brawls. At any rate, in 1701, the year after the death of Dryden, he published the most important and significant of his critical writings, the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry. A Critical Discourse in Two Parts. The first shewing that the Principal Reason why the Ancients excell'd the Moderns in the*

[49] *Original Letters*, p. 121.

greater Poetry, was because they mix'd Religion with Poetry. The Second, Proving that by joining Poetry with the Religion reveal'd to us in Sacred Writ, the Modern Poets may come to equal the Ancients. The author always regarded this treatise with a pride that was in part justified by its reception, for it was probably the only one of his critical writings that ever attained to a third edition.[50]

As a sequel to the *Advancement and Reformation* Dennis published in 1704 his *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry—Being a Preliminary to a Larger Work—to be entitl'd, A Criticism upon our most Celebrated English Poets deceas'd.* This small volume of one hundred and fifty pages contains the beginnings of Dennis's projected *magnum opus,* together with a copy of the prospectus he had issued, outlining the nature and scope of the work, giving a few specimen pages, and inviting subscriptions at the rate of one guinea for the volume.[51] This proposal was issued sometime in 1703; and the work of securing subscriptions was pushed by a Mr. Welby, a Mr. Maxwell, a Mr. Harmon, and Dr. Garth. But these solicitors met with such slight encouragement that, though they had the lists in hand for about a year, they secured but seventy subscribers.[52] Consequently Dennis was obliged to give up the project, though he did so very reluctantly and stated in his preface to the *Grounds of Criticism:*

"My friends know very well that I was three Months employ'd about that Work, after the last Subscription came in, and I appeal to them, if it was not high time to lay it aside for something that might be more Bene-

[50] This it did in 1725. The second edition appeared in 1709.

[51] ". . . it is impossible for any Bookseller to make it worth the Undertakers Trouble in employing so much Time and Thought as so great and important Design requires, the lovers of *Criticism* are therefore desir'd . . . at least to encourage it by their Subscriptions at the Rate of a Guinea a Book, paying half a Guinea down at the time of subscribing and half at the delivery of the Book in Quires; the Undertaker promising at the same time that not a Book shall be printed more than the number subscrib'd." From the Prospectus included in the *Grounds of Criticism.*

[52] "When Crites the most consumate Critic of the Age, and at the same time a poet of the first Magnitude, propos'd the publishing of a Complete Body of Criticism in Poetry, he got not above Seventy Guineas in Subscription." Gildon's *Complete Art of Poetry,* 1717, I, 185.

ficial; I have printed all that I had by me entire to shew that I was in very good Earnest, and that it was not my Fault that I did not do the rest."

In proof of the honesty of his intentions Dennis published under the title of the *Grounds of Criticism* all the material he had completed for this great work. In these pages he stated the chief rules upon which he had intended to rear his critical structure, which he hoped should be "perhaps the greatest in this kind of writing that has ever been conceived by the Moderns." The latter part of the treatise is devoted in good part to a comparison between Tasso and Milton, usually much to the Puritan's advantage. On the whole this is a really valuable book, so we can only regret that its reception was not sufficiently flattering to induce the author to proceed with the proposed opus.[58]

In this period Dennis wrote two other critical pamphlets, an *Essay on the Italian Operas* and the *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier's Letter, being a Dissuasive from the Play House.* The latter was published about the beginning of the year 1704 in reply to the *Dissuasive from the Play House. Occasioned by the late Calamity of the Tempest. In a Letter to a Person of Quality.* The great storm that had swept over England in 1703, Collier declared, had been sent as a judgment upon the nation for permitting "the enormities of the theatres." To the people leaving the churches on the fast day ordered at that time by the authorities, copies of Collier's tract were distributed gratuitously; and such was the outcry raised against the stage "that there was a warm Report about Town, that it had twice been debated in Council, whether the Theatres should be shut up or continued." Such a state of affairs naturally aroused Dennis to his second reply to Collier, in which he mingled good natured raillery with serious argument. Though this reply was well received, especially by Buckingham, Lands-

[58] In the list of subscribers which Dennis included in the preface to the *Grounds of Criticism* occur the names of Lord Somers, the Duke of Devonshire, Mrs. Manley, William Walsh, Anthony Henley "for two," Lord Winchilsea, Sir Richard Blackmore, and Thomas Brown. Richard Norton, the author of the forgotten tragedy *Pausanius, the Betrayer of his Country,* 1696, subscribed for six copies of Dennis's proposed work.

downe, and Halifax, it was so ephemeral that sixteen years later the author declared[54] "it is now as scarce as any Manuscript of which there is but one Copy."

Two years later Dennis wrote another critical pamphlet in defense of the drama, this time against the enemies within its own house. His small tract of thirty pages, an *Essay on the Operas after the Italian Manner, which are about to be establish'd on the English stage; With some Reflections upon the Dangers which they may bring the Publick,* 1706, was the author's first pronunciamento of a long and uncompromising opposition to the Italian music which had invaded the English stage and was making inroads upon the regular drama. In his early attack upon this fashionable kind of entertainment, Dennis was taking one of the few critical positions to be held by all the principal contemporary writers, including Steele, Addison, Swift, and Pope.[55] This essay was the only attack of Dennis's against the opera which ever attained to the dignity of a pamphlet, though he scattered through his writings frequent dicta upon the subject, and, according to Disraeli,[56] when Harley came to power in 1710, sent him a letter, declaring that England could never prosper while the corrupting Italian opera flourished.

These essays in criticism were all written with moderation and were free from personal abuse. The one notable attack upon Dennis in this period[57] was that by Swift in the *Digres-*

[54] *Original Letters,* p. 227.

[55] The discussions of foreign music in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* are well known as is also the attempt to meet this invasion of foreign music with such operas as Addison's *Rosamond,* 1706. Pope's attacks were not so vigorous, although his sneer at "dying to an eunuch's song" is characteristic of his attitude. Though Swift could write to Philips in 1708 that "Critic Dennis vows to God that operas will be the ruin of the nation and brings examples from antiquity to prove it," he took occasion, nevertheless, in the third number of the *Intelligencer* to declare that "we are overrun with Italian effeminacy and Italian nonsense."

[56] The *Calamities of Authors,* London, 1867, p. 57.

[57] Bedford, in his *Evils and Dangers of Stage Plays,* Bristol, 1706, attacked Dennis, along with the other dramatists of the time, for the immorality of his plays, especially of *Liberty Asserted* and *Gibraltar.* But there is nothing personal in his reflections.

sion Concerning Critics—the famous third chapter of his *Tale of a Tub,* which appeared in 1704. Swift here characterized Dennis with Bentley, Rymer, and Perrault, as among the "descendents of Momus and Hybris who begat Zoilus"; and he then proceeded to enumerate the qualifications of the "True Critics," such as dullness and fault-finding.

Dennis, however, made no reply. Possibly he did not read the attack; and even if he did, he may have considered it unnecessary to answer, for in spite of his strong prejudices and hearty aggressiveness he lived at this time in comparative quiet with a set of writers whose relations with each other could never be characterized as amicable. His position as one of the foremost of contemporary English critics was well established, and we of today have no reason for revising the judgment of his associates. His writings through these years had clearly shown him a better critic than poet, for his verses and dramas do not rank very high even in that time of inferior bards and unremembered playwrights. Fortunately one of his effusions had possessed sufficient merit to induce the government to provide in part at least for his livelihood. The hope of patronage had, however, but little weight with Dennis in moulding the views expressed in his political pamphlets, which, while generally leaning toward the whig policies, manifested a genuine regard for public above private interest. Had he died in 1710, Dennis would now be remembered as a small dramatist and pamphleteer and as a much better critic—a man who, for the most part, was esteemed and respected by his contemporaries; and he would have been spared a petulant old age filled with quarrels with some of his celebrated contemporaries—Swift and Steele, Addison, and Pope, brawls which for two centuries have been used to stigmatize him in literary history.

III

1710–1734

The third and last period of Dennis's life, from his first quarrel with Pope in 1711 to his death in 1734, covers nearly a quarter of a century of remarkable activity. Though Dennis was almost fifty-five at the beginning of this period, he was still to issue nearly thirty publications of different sorts, ranging in importance from some hasty pamphlets to a carefully revised edition of the *Works*, and ending with a task in translation when he was seventy-six and almost blind.

In the divisions of his life already discussed his lot had been, on the whole, a comfortable one: he had enjoyed at least fair health; he had numbered among his benefactors many of the great patrons of the age; and he was generally recognized as one of the foremost, if not the greatest, of the critics of the time. That he felt his importance is evident from his statements regarding the value of the theory he had advanced for the improvement of poetry and from his estimate of his contribution to the drama.[1] In the previous period this self esteem had been buoyed up by his reception among the literary men of the time, by a comparative independence of means, and by the expectation of what he might still accomplish. But by 1710 the generation of Dryden had either died or given place to the groups of writers that centered around Addison and Steele, or Swift and Pope. Though Addison had once sat with Dennis in the group around Dryden, he was fifteen years younger than the critic, so that it is not surprising that he never identified himself very closely with the older generation. Dennis was naturally a *laudator temporis acti*, and his literary tastes and inclinations were by this time thoroughly fixed. It

[1] Preface to the *Invader of His Country*, "Thus did they [the managers of Drury-Lane] take occasion to exercise a real Barbarity upon an old Acquaintance to whom they and their stage are more oblig'd than to any Writer in England."

was but natural, therefore, that he regarded with dislike the "machine turned" verse then growing in popularity and gaining rewards. Rewards and prosperity were, in fact, the gods of the age; it was a time when the nation, even to the village clergymen, could go mad with the South Sea frenzy. The infection spread to the literary classes, so that it is possibly not too much to say that never before nor since could the mercenariness that sometimes accompanies poverty be so justly charged to the writers of the age. From this scramble of timeservers Dennis stood aloof, rather defiantly defending poverty, and declaring that if Homer was not in debt, it was because no one would trust him. Indeed we cannot help admiring and pitying him too as he writes thus:

"I have been so far from any ambitious Aims or any sordid views of Interest that I have consented to see several of the Publick Rewards engross'd by some who are luke warm, and by others who are *Jacobites* in Whig clothing, while I have remain'd very poor at a very advanced Age."[2]

In such a town of intrigue and pursuit of gain, where every author was known to his contemporaries, personal peculiarities did not escape severe comment and ridicule. Pope's misshapen form attracted more satire than even he could have answered in a half dozen *Dunciads;* Steele's short, dark face was a frequent subject for ridicule; and Dennis's personal appearance grew more and more inviting of attack. His short figure, broadening with the years,[3] his great scowling face,[4] the large eyes that stared from beneath their shaggy brows, these with a

[2] *Original Letters,* p. 84.

[3] In 1720, Dennis in inviting Moyle to revisit his old companions whom he had not seen for twenty years, says: "You will see in this Town old Friends with new Shapes and Faces. For example, you will find your old Friend Mr. W—— dwindled into those narrow Dimensions in which you formerly beheld me and your humble Servant enlarged to his *Quondam* noble Bulk and Proportions." *Original Letters,* p. 213.

[4] One of the headings proposed for a life of Dennis in the *Critical Specimen,* p. 14, reads thus: "CH. XXI. A Discourse of the Critick concerning the exact Contraction and Expansion of the Muscles of a True Hypercritical Countenance, the most learned manner of Frowning as it were with Judgment; together with the whole Art of Staring." On page 3 of this same tract Dennis is referred to as "the Renown'd Rinaldo Furioso, Critick of the Woeful Countenance."

slovenliness of dress that grew more noticeable with the passing of time,[5] formed a marked contrast with the slender youth of the town, who had followed the fashions with Fleetwood Shepherd. As a young man, too, Dennis had possessed a rough kind of humor that could return a bluff jest; but this gradually gave way before his growing literalmindedness, which first gained him a name as the foe of puns and later, in one instance at least, vitiated his work as a critic. Such are some of the changes in the man and his times; others will be noticed in passing.

Among these changes which the years brought to Dennis was the loss of the patrons who had known and favored him. Halifax was appointed first Lord of the Treasury in 1714 and soon after probably rendered Dennis an important service by insisting upon a certain reversion of the income when the critic sold his waitership. But the hope of any further provision from Halifax was cut off by his death in 1716, not long after that of another of Dennis's patrons, Lord Somers; and these losses were followed in 1721 by the death of Buckingham. There were, however, some of the old patrons who still regarded Dennis with favor: the Earl of Pembroke received in this period another dedication from our author[6] and till the time of his death, which was almost coincident with that of the critic, sent occasional gifts. Walpole, who allowed the old author £ 20 a year for several years, and Bolingbroke are among the most noted of Dennis's new benefactors of these times; but they never did anything very generous for the critic, evidently regarding him as one of the poorer dependents of the literary family whose needs required occasional recognition. These chance gifts, however, were the more acceptable from the fact that few of Dennis's writings during these years were of such a nature as to permit a dedication. A play or a poem, however inferior, generally found a welcome that would never be accorded a criticism of a popular book; consequently Dennis was forced to preface many of these pamphlets with

[5] "Ch.XX. Of the Manner of Wearing his Breeches, with a short Essay to show that the most natural Position of Rolls for Stockings is about one's Heels." *Critical Specimen*, p. 13.

[6] That of *Vice and Luxury*, 1711.

introductory letters to such men as Theobald and Duckett,[7] from whom no reward might be expected. Dennis's one play of this period, the *Invader of his Country,* was dedicated to the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Newcastle, who, because of the fight at that time over the control of the theatre, had come to share the author's dislike for Steele. Moreover, with his increasing ill-health and his retirement from society, Dennis found it a matter of growing difficulty to secure the ear of a possible patron, as is witnessed by his dedicating his *Miscellaneous Tracts* to the Earl of Scarborough, whom, he confessed in the dedication, he "had met but once, and that by accident." The year before his death Dennis found a new friend in Colonel Bladen,[8] whose unexpected present he gratefully acknowledges in the dedication of his translation of Burnet's *State of Departed Souls.* Whatever may have interested Bladen in the old critic, he certainly gave doubly by giving opportunely; for taking the period as a whole, Dennis's rewards from his patrons were probably even smaller than his returns from his publishers.

Regarding the more purely personal affairs of his life during this period, we possess scanty information, save for the years 1717–1720, on which some additional light is occasionally shed by the hints in his collection of literary letters, 1721. This correspondence, however, contains but little concerning his private affairs during the earlier years of the second decade of

[7] George Duckett was for many years a member of parliament for the family borough of Calne, Wiltshire, and from 1722 to the time of his death, ten years later, one of the commissioners of excise. He is to be remembered as the friend of Addison and as the enemy of Pope. In 1715–16 he published either alone or perhaps in conjunction with Sir Thomas Burnet, several attacks upon Pope's translation of the *Iliad.* Duckett and Burnet also coöperated in promoting two weekly journals, the *Grumbler* and the *Pasquin.*

[8] Martin Bladen (1680–1746) is to be remembered chiefly as a member of parliament for over thirty years and as one of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations. In 1705 he published his *Orpheus and Eurydice, a Masque,* which anticipated by about two years Dennis's treatment of the same story. If he was the Bladen mentioned in I. 504 of the *Dunciad,* as has been conjectured, his enmity toward Pope may have aroused his sympathy for Dennis.

the century beyond an occasional allusion to his "great misfortunes."[9] Dennis probably refers to these affairs when he states in the fourth letter to Sir John Edgar, *i. e.*, Steele, "If I had the misfortune to be an insolvent debtor, I should have this apology to make for myself, that my insolvency would not be owing to my extravagance or want of taking pains, but to the hard, not to say unjust usage . . . which I have met with in the world." This trouble whatever it was, began some time before 1711, the date of the publication of Dennis's *Reflections* upon Pope's *Essay on Criticism,* and continued till January, 1715, when he secured relief by selling his waitership to Benj. Hudson Esq., probably for £ 600.[10] His patron Halifax insisted that he should stipulate for a reversion of the salary for a number of years with the view of securing an income for the remainder of his life; and this interposition afterwards proved of greatest value to the short sighted critic. Cibber's *Lives of the Poets,* IV, 216, has a muddled story about Halifax's insisting that Dennis secure a reversion of the income from the waitership for forty years, that Dennis acknowl-

[9] The *Theatre,* II, 248.

[10] The warrant permitting Dennis to sell his place reads as follows: "After our hearty commendations,—Whereas his Majesty by letters patent bearing the date of the 17th day of March in the first year of his reign was pleased to continue to John Dennis, Esq. the office of one of the King's Waiters in the Port of London during His Majesty's Royal Pleasure, which said office being now revoked and determined and the same granted by other His Majesty's Letters Patent unto Benj. Hudson Esq: These are to authorize and to require you to make payment unto the said John Dennis or his Assignees of all such Sum or Sums of Money as are incurred and grown due to him on his salary of £52. P. annum in respect to said office from the time he was last paid to the day of revocation thereof by the Letters Patent last mentioned. And this shall be as well to you for payment as to the Auditor for allowing thereof on your account a Sufficient Warrant.

Treasury Chambers, 21 March, 1715. R. Walpole
To our very loving friend W. St.Quintin
Henry Ferne, Esq. P. Methuen
Recr. Genl. & Cashier to His Majesty's Customs. F. Newport.

"The Letters Patent appointing Benj. Hudson as Dennis's successor are dated 17th of March 1715, Enrollments L, p. 41." *Gentleman's Magazine,* 1850, XII, pt. ii, p. 18.

edged this interference in the dedication of his poem on the battle of Ramillies, and that he survived the reversion. The dates of Dennis's appointment and of his death, 1705 and 1734, in themselves show the absurdity of any statement that he outlived a forty year reversion of the income. It seems much more probable that this provision was for fifteen years, a period apparently ample for anticipating the remainder of the critic's life. Moreover, such a reversion would be in harmony with the well authenticated statements that the last years of his life were a time of great poverty. Our author's acknowledgment in the preface to *Ramillies* of Halifax's interference in his behalf was rather an allusion to his patron's assistance in securing the position which he had received but a few months before, and for which he had had no opportunity of thanking Halifax publicly. It appears more probable that the interposition of Halifax came at the time of the sale of the waitership, especially as he was then the first Lord of the Treasury.[10a]

From 1711 to 1715 Dennis lived, for a part of the time at least, within the verges of the royal court, where he was safe from arrest for debt.[11] For a while, too, he lived at Jack Richardson's Tower Den, which he later left for what Gay in his facetious dedication to the *Mohocks,* 1712, was pleased

[10a] Possibly Halifax endeavored about this time to give Dennis some substantial aid; for the *Weekly Packet* for July 30–Aug. 6, 1715, states that Nahum Tate died on the previous Saturday, and that it was said that he would be succeeded as Poet Laureate and as Royal Historiographer by Mr. John Dennis, one of the King's Waiters at the Customs' House. The next week, August 13, 1715, Dawkes's *Newsletter* stated that N. Rowe would be Poet Laureate and J. Dennis Royal Historiographer.

[11] The *Theatre,* II, 248. In Samuel Ireland's *Graphic Illustrations of Hogarth,* 1794, II, 86, is given a characteristic story of Dennis's poverty and his fearful suspicion: "Having one Saturday night strayed beyond his privileged bounds to a public house, such was his apprehension, that having, as soon as he entered, cast his eye upon a man, whose countenance did not argue very favorably for him, he crept into an obscure corner to avoid the notice of the person, whom his fears converted into a Bailiff. "At length, however, the clock struck twelve, when the critic threw off his alarm and cried out 'Now, Sir Bailiff, or no Bailiff, your power is expired. I don't care a farthing for you.'"

to call an "Elegant Retreat in the Country." But the attractions of the town were always strong for Dennis, hence, if we are to give any credit to Swift's biting poem, *John Dennis, the Sheltering Poet's Invitation,* the next year found the critic living at the Mint, where he is represented as urging Steele to come and share his security. Probably with the hope of bettering his condition Dennis now wrote his only long poem of this period, *Upon the Accession of King George to the Imperial Crown of Great Britain,* a commonplace production which, though it may have had a little weight in securing the confirmation of the waitership, brought no other reward.

In 1715 Dennis was relieved from his immediate burdens by the sale of his waitership; and, for a time at least, he lived in quiet security. When, in the controversy with Steele in 1720, he was twitted about his debts, he replied thus:[12] "to shew you that I am not in the condition you imagine, I have for the last four years lodged continually in the neighborhood of Whitehall; and I appeal to the Honourable Board of the Green Cloth if, during this time, so much as one complaint has been preferred against me." After this period of trouble, Dennis resumed his old habits of spending a part of the year in the country,[13] induced partly by his love of nature and partly by the hope of improving his health, for to the weight of the other vexations of these years was added that of sickness. As early as 1712 or 1713[14] he was obliged to treasure his sight, but even such care did not prevent his becoming almost totally blind in his old age. He was, moreover, like Defoe, forced to bear another and more painful infirmity, that of the

[12] The *Theatre* II, 248.

[13] For example, in 1716 he left London in June, was in Hanworth on the 20th of September, and back at Whitehall on October 3. The next year he left town on July 3 and three weeks later was in Cobham, a market town in Surrey, whence he proceeded on a short tour through the wilds of Surrey. He was back in Hampstead before the close of October. Cobham seems to have been one of his favorite retreats, since he wrote: "For tho' I have been ten times here, yet as my former Lodgings had the finest Meadows and Streams in the World behind them, I scarce ever came into the Village so that until this last Arrival, I knew nothing of the People of Cobham." *Original Letters,* p. 133.

[14] *Original Letters,* p. 197.

stone, with which he was troubled for years.[15] The letters between 1715 and 1721 show Dennis so wracked with this disease that he feared he might die. In 1722, 1724 and 1728 he was still suffering with this complaint, which seems to have grown worse with his advancing years.

In these years of debt and sickness and retirement Dennis naturally took but a slight part in politics. He was, however, interested in the great national events and in 1715 attacked the Jacobite clergy in one of his most successful pamphlets. This tract of sixty small pages, entitled *Priestcraft Distinguish'd from Christianity*,[15a] was occasioned by the growing sentiment in favor of the Pretender, which was soon to culminate in open rebellion. Dennis here urged that through their seditious words and deeds these Jacobite clergy were showing themselves the true disciples of Antichrist. This pamphlet met with a very favorable reception, maintained its popularity for several years, and reached a third edition in 1718. The landing of the Pretender in 1715 drew from Dennis a letter to a friend that shows he knew the English nation well enough to have no apprehension of the reestablishment of the house of Stuart; and his allegiance to the existing government was strengthened by the repeal of the Occasional Conformity Act and the Schism Act. Moreover, he vigorously opposed the growing corruption in the political life of the times and strongly condemned the South Sea enterprise long before the crash came.

The protest of this eighteenth century Carlyle against the increasing luxury of the times, which was probably intensified

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 13, 204, 201; *Vice and Luxury*, p. 100, and its dedication iv.

[15a] *Priestcraft Distinguish'd from Christianity.* Shewing, I. That Wicked *Priests* are the real *Antichrists* mention'd in *Scriptures.* II. That the Corruptions of the *Laity* in all *Christian States,* proceeds from the Corruptions of the *Clergy.* III. That there was a more *General Virtue* in the grossest Times of *Paganism,* than there has been since our *Saviour* came into the World. IV. That there is a more *General Virtue* in other Parts of the *Globe,* than in the *Christian World.* V. That there was more *General Virtue* in our own Nation in the Times of our *Ancestors,* than there is in our *own Times;* and that *Priestcraft,* and *Corruption of Manners,* have increas'd together.

by the hardship of his own lot, is the most marked characteristic of his other three political essays of this period. The first of these, his *Essay upon Publick Spirit; being a Satyr in Prose upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times, the Chief Source of our present Parties and Diversions,* appeared early in 1711 and brought from Lintot a return of 2l. 12s. 6d. Dennis's doctrine in this essay may be stated briefly thus: the love of one's country, which is the basis of national union, is in the main a love of their manners. But the purity and distinction of English manners were being destroyed by the increasing luxury and by the growing imitation of the French and Italians. To preserve the national strength and integrity the island must return to its old customs.

To this same theme Dennis returned in another political pamphlet published eleven years later, 1722, which bore the somewhat formidable title *Julius Caesar Acquitted and his Murderers Condemn'd. In a Letter to a Friend, shewing That it was not Caesar who destroyed the Roman Liberties, but the Corruption of the Romans themselves. Occasion'd by two Letters in the London Journal, the one on the 2nd, the other on the 9th of December. To which is added a Second Letter, shewing, that if ever the Liberties of Great Britain are lost, they will be lost in no other Way than by the Corruption of the People of Great Britain themselves.* The title gives a very fair idea of the contents of this pamphlet, whose author was coming more and more to feel that England was a fen of stagnant waters.

Dennis exhibited much the same attitude in his last and longest political tract, *Vice and Luxury Public Mischiefs: or Remarks on a Book Intitul'd The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vices Public Benefits,* 1724. Our author was here replying[16] to the 1723 edition of Mandeville's book, which contained along with the *Fable of the Bees* an *Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue,* an *Essay on Charity Schools,* and a *Search into the Nature of Society.* These essays bore a much

[16] Besides this tract by Dennis the following replies to Mandeville may be mentioned: Richard Fiddes's *General Treatise on Morality;* William Law's *Remarks on the Fable of the Bees;* and Francis Hutchinson in *Hibernicus's Letters.*

closer relation than their titles would indicate, for they were permeated in common with a cynical system of morality, and all of them advocated the doctrine that prosperity is increased by expenditure rather than by saving. It is easy to see why such a book evoked a prompt and indignant response from Dennis, who restated and amplified some of his objections to "luxury and ungodliness." Against Mandeville's pamphlet Dennis protested both on moral and on political grounds. To the old critic the established religion of every country was the basis of the public morality and the foundation of the nation's government; and consequently the growing luxury and scepticism of the times were both undermining Christianity and threatening the constitution. What little we know of the reception of this the last of Dennis's political pamphlets is quite favorable.

Dennis's activitiy as a political pamphleteer in this period was, however, slight compared with his labors as a judge of letters. His critical writings of these years may be divided into two classes—those which are important chiefly as specimens of pure criticism, and those which, while interesting for their judicial dicta, have an added value as recording the struggles of their writer with his famous contemporaries, Addison and Steele, Swift and Pope. These conflicts sometimes degenerated into personal abuse; but always ostensibly, and for the most part in fact, they were waged on the field of criticism, and on the whole it seems most satisfactory to treat them accordingly.

In the class of what we may call pure criticism the earliest and perhaps the most important of Dennis's writings of this period was the *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: with Some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator,* London, 1712, which the author dedicated to Lord Lansdowne as "the one who best understood Shakespear." Though Dennis may have conceived these letters during his lucubrations over *Coriolanus,*[17] he begins almost as if in fulfillment of the promise made twenty years before in the *Impartial Critick* "to prove that contrary to Mr. Rymer, Shakespear was a great genius."

[17] *Original Letters,* p. 371.

Dennis devoted the second and third of the letters composing this pamphlet to showing that "Shakespear had no familiar acquaintance with the *Grecian* and *Roman* authors," a task which, on the whole, he handled admirably. To these letters on Shakspere he appended two others addressed to the "Spectator," which may more properly be left for later notice.

In 1721 Dennis printed his *Original Letters, Familiar, Moral and Critical. In Two Volumes.* These two volumes, which were frequently bound together and, in all the copies which the present writer has examined, were paged consecutively, form a miscellany of biography, politics, literary reminiscences, and criticism, with the last named class so emphasized as to give tone to the collection. The familiar letters consist chiefly of notes to Dennis's patrons—Buckingham, Godolphin, Halifax, and Marlborough, and to some of his literary acquaintance, such as Prior and Moyle. The moral ones are directed chiefly against political evils, such as stock jobbing and civic corruption. Though some of the critical letters, as, for example, the *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier* and the Letters on the *Genius and Writings of Shakespear* were simply reprints of his former work, the book contains many of his literary dicta previously unpublished, such as his discussion of the *vis comica,* his disapproval of the ballads, and his estimate of his friend Wycherley. These *Letters* form a valuable source for the study of the literary history of these times and are now so scarce as to deserve republication.

In 1726, five years after the appearance of the *Letters,* Dennis came forward for the fourth time,[18] as he says, in behalf of the theatre, with his *Stage Defended from Scripture, Reason and the Common Sense of Mankind for Two Thousand Years. Occasion'd by Mr. Law's Late Pamphlet against Stage Entertainments.* In his attack Law had shown himself more intolerant and less well informed than was Collier, and these weaknesses afforded Dennis an advantage upon which

[18] The four defenses of the playhouse to which Dennis alludes probably include beside the one against Law and the two against Collier his controversy with Steele, for he goes on to discuss the ingratitude of the managers of the theatre.

he was quick to seize. Most of his arguments were repetitions of those he had advanced against Collier twenty years before, but he restated them in a fresh and interesting way that gained respectful attention.

This pamphlet against Law, like nearly all of his earlier controversial tracts, was free from personal abuse and stuck to the discussion of the question at issue. In the conflicts now to be considered between him and some of the best known writers of the age—Addison and Steele, Swift and Pope, it is notable that Dennis generally took arms in a thoroughly justifiable defense of himself. It must be confessed, of course, that his physical peculiarities, his unconcealed self-satisfaction, his uncompromising independence, all invited attack; and Addison may have had Dennis in mind in his discussion of butts in conversation, which appeared in the 47th *Spectator:* "I know several of these Butts who are men of Wit and Sense, though by some odd Turn of Humour, some unlucky cast in their Person or Behavior, they always have the Misfortune to make the Company merry." Moreover, it was at the beginning of this very paper that Addison had used Dennis as a butt by quoting and facetiously praising two lines from the latter's translation of a satire from Boileau:

> "Thus one Fool lolls his Tongue out at another,
> And shakes his empty Noodle at his Brother."

Just when Addison and others came to assume this attitude toward Dennis, is hard to say; but such stories as that regarding the critic's escapade upon his introduction to Lord Halifax, though they may be of later invention, indicate that he had early become an object of banter.[19]

But it was Dennis's uncompromising opposition to the "unmerited success" of some of the chief authors of his day that brought on most of his conflicts. In fact only one pamphlet directed against him is to be mentioned which did

[19] Theobald states in the *Censor,* 1717, II, 33: "The Wags who see him [Dennis] sitting in a *Coffee House* brim full of *Aristotle* and *Dacier,* and in Pain till he drops some of his Learning among them, soon ease him of that Burthen in order to impose a heavier one upon him by speaking well of his Contemporaries."

not emanate from some one of these famous writers or their immediate allies. This single tract, which may really be no exception to the rule, since it appeared anonymously, is entitled the *Critical Specimen,* 1711. It purports to be a prospectus of a large work to be issued by Dennis and gives a burlesque specimen chapter, followed by the titles of thirty-five proposed chapters, most of them hits at him either as an author or as a critic.

But with this possible exception practically all the attacks on Dennis emanated from these most popular writers of a younger generation. It is interesting and significant to note that within the year 1711 Dennis found himself embroiled with four of his renowned adversaries, Steele and Addison, Swift and Pope. It should also be noted that, to the knowledge of the present writer at least, none of the biographers of these celebrated authors has traced consecutively or exhaustively the relations of his particular subject with Dennis, and that such a treatment should throw some light upon these greater figures of the early eighteenth century.

Of these writers the first to pass away was Addison, whom we have already noticed in connection with the Dryden group. Like Dennis he contributed verses laudatory of Dryden to the *Third Miscellany,* and he probably did some writing in conjunction with our author.[20] Again, at a private reading of Dennis's poem on the battle of Ramillies, when it was still in manuscript,[21] Addison had praised the work; and the two lived in a state of at least nominal cordiality till the fortieth number of the *Spectator* appeared with its attack on Dennis's favorite theory of poetic justice, which it branded as a "ridiculous Doctrine in Modern Criticism," with "no Foundation in Nature, in Reason, or in the Practice of the Ancients." Dennis thought Steele the author of the article, for it was to him that he returned a prompt answer, which was probably sent direct to the supposed writer. Addison made no reply, though he came back to the subject of poetic justice about a

[20] "Did you not vouchsafe to club with him in several of his undertakings, and thought it no disgrace?" An *Answer to a Whimsical Pamphlet called the Character of Sir John Edgar,* in the *Theatre,* II, 391.

[21] *Original Letters,* p. 421.

year later in the 443rd number (July 16, 1712) and again in the 548th. It was only a little over a week, however, after the publication of the first article on poetic justice that he printed what seems to have been an attack on Dennis in connection with the essay on butts. The cut was the more severe because Dennis had expected some favorable mention of his work by the "Spectator,"[22] so that it was but natural that he should write a sarcastic letter to Steele,[23] whom he supposed to be the author. It seems probable that Dennis may also have ascribed to Steele[24] the 70th number of the *Spectator*, Addison's famous critique of the old ballads, which our author attacked in a long letter to Henry Cromwell. Six months later Addison devoted the 253rd number of the *Spectator* to a discussion of the ill nature of critics.

While the relations between Dennis and the "Spectator" were thus strained, Addison's *Cato* was produced on the fourteenth of April, 1713, and met with a success too well known to require description. That the popularity of *Cato* was due to the force of party spirit rather than to any great intrinsic merit of the drama itself, is now generally admitted; but in 1713 it required considerable courage to attack a play which was so widely praised at home, and which had been translated into French and Italian. Prompted, however, by his habitual antagonism to unmerited popularity, his genuine desire to advance the noble art of the drama, and his frankly avowed willingness to "retort personal injuries," Dennis yielded to the importunities of his small circle of friends and prepared some remarks on *Cato*.[25] These *Remarks*, however, were not pub-

[22] *Original Letters*, p. 425.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 421. Dennis evidently wrote to the *Spectator* several letters, which have perished, of a much more bitter nature than those included in his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: With Some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator*, 1712, for he says on page 66 of that pamphlet: "I am about [to shew my just Resentment] by publishing three or four modest Letters which I have pick'd and cull'd from the numerous company of those which are more bitter, and which I resolve to suppress in order to shew that I have a Soul that is capable of remembering Obligations, as well as avenging Injuries."

[24] *Original Letters*, p. 167.

[25] *Remarks upon Cato, A Tragedy By Mr. Dennis*, London, 1713.

lished immediately upon their composition. In fact, on the nineteenth of June, 1713, probably soon after he had finished his criticism, Dennis wrote to Buckingham, who had evidently remonstrated with him:[26]

"I humbly desire your Grace to believe, that if you had given me no Caution I had by no means done anything, which might cause me to forfeit your good Opinion of me. So far were my Thoughts from that, that I never yet resolv'd to publish those Remarks. 'Tis very likely, that after your Grace, and my Lord *Halifax,* and Two or Three more have perus'd them, I may send them to the Author, and content myself, with letting him know my Power."

But this same letter shows Dennis's deep resentment at the treatment he had received from the "Spectator," which he described as "not only an Assassination but one of the blackest sort. It was done in the dark, no Provocation in the least given, no Name to the Paper, and no Author known, when at the very same Time, they openly profes't Friendship to me." It is not surprising, therefore, that before long the oversensitive and oversuspicious old critic should have permitted the publication of these *Remarks.*

In the *Remarks* Dennis's shrewd, independent observation frequently breaks through his respect for the rules then so generally accepted in judging the merits of a play. In his regard for the unity of place Addison had confined his various scenes of conspiracy, senatorial council, and love making all to the hall of the Governor of Utica's palace, a weakness which Dennis was quick to ridicule. And if he shows some sandy wastes of criticism, such as his contention that the play has no fable, therefore it has no moral and consequently is not legitimately a tragedy, we must remember that he was judging a drama which has been characterized as "marking the nearest approach in the English theatre to the unreserved acceptance of the French canons."

Dennis stated in the preface to his *Remarks* that he recognized that he invited abusive replies; but he did not know at the time that Pope had prevailed upon Lintot to obtain and publish the attack on *Cato,* and that he had done so largely to gain a pretense for publishing an abusive tract called the

[26] *Original Letters,* p. 55.

Narrative of Dr. R. Norris, concerning the Strange and Deplorable Frenzy of Mr. John Dennis, An Officer in the Custom House. But the story of this affair may best be given in Dennis's own words from the preface to his *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock:*

"At the height of his [Pope's] profession of friendship for Mr. Addison, he could not bear the success of Cato, but prevails upon B. L. to engage me to write and publish Remarks on that Tragedy, which after I had done, A. P—E, the better to conceal himself from Mr. Addison and his friends, writes and publishes a scandalous Pamphlet equally foolish and villainous, in which he pretends that I am in the hands of a quack who cures mad men."

The "imp of the perverse" which dwelt in Pope probably tempted him with the triple pleasure of seeing *Cato* attacked, Addison angered at Dennis, and himself afforded another excuse for ridiculing the author of the *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism.* If Pope expected by such an attack to win favor with Addison, he was disappointed; for the latter commissioned Steele to write the following letter to the publisher of the *Remarks upon Cato:*

Aug 4, 1713.

"*Mr. Lintot,*

Mr. *Addison* desires me to tell you that he wholly disapproves the Manner of treating Mr. *Dennis* in a little Pamphlet by the way of Dr. *Norris's* Account. When he thinks fit to take notice of Mr. *Dennis's* objections to his writings, he will do so in a way that Mr. *Dennis* shall have no reason to complain of. But when the Papers above mentioned were offered to be communicated to him, he said he could not either in Honour or in Conscience be privy to such a Treatment, and was sorry to hear of it.

I am, Sir,
Your very humble Servant,
RICHARD STEELE."

Just when Dennis learned the truth regarding the authorship of the *Narrative of the Strange Frenzy,* is hard to determine. In 1716, three years after the publication of this tract, appeared the *True Character of Mr. Pope,* very probably by Dennis, containing the query, "who wrote a prologue in praise of Cato, and teas'd Lintot to publish Remarks on it?"[27]

[27] In an article published in the *Athenaeum,* May 8, 1858, and practically reprinted in his *Papers of a Critic,* London, 1878 (I, 243), Dilke en-

A year later in his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer,* p. 62, Dennis made the following allusion to the affair: "And now let him, if he wishes to, have recourse to his old Method of Lyes and Slander, and print a second Dr. Norris account." As for Addison, his only notable retort to Dennis appeared in the *Spectator,* September 10, 1714, in his discussion of modern critics, where, in much the same vein as that of the 253rd number previously noticed, he censured those writers who make it a rule to fall upon every successful play. As for the critic's own plays, he went on, few of them had ever "been disgraced by a Run of Three Days." Then as a final shot he declared that "the words, Unity, Action, Sentiment, and Diction, pronounced with an Air of Authority, gave them [the critics] a Figure among unlearned Readers, who are apt to believe that they are deep because they are unintelligible."

These differences between Addison and Dennis, however, had been marked but by comparatively few personalities, so we may well accept as probable Wilson's statement[28] that Con-

deavored to disprove Pope's authorship of this pamphlet. His argument rests largely upon two contentions: first, that Dennis's earliest recorded accusation of Pope as the author did not appear before 1727, when he published his *Remarks upon the Rape of the Lock;* and second, that in a letter to Caryll, dated August 17, 1713, Pope denies writing "the whim upon Dennis." The first of Dilke's statements is disproved by the quotation cited in the paragraph above; while the second has been answered thus by Courthope and Elwin:

"Although Pope here denies that he wrote the pamphlet, yet, when, in 1735, he published an extract from the letter to Caryll, in which he offered his pen in his defense and applied the passage to Addison (see Pope's *Works,* VI, 398) he added in a note that the defense to which he alludes was the very narrative of Dr. Norris. The note was repeated in 1735, in the acknowledged edition of the Letters, and was thus an open confession that the Narrative was his own work. The question whether his private denial or his public avowal was false, seems to be decided by the consideration that he could never have ventured to have laid claim in print to another man's production. To this must be added that Pope's contemporaries always spoke of it as his undoubted work, that his literary confidant Warburton did the same, and that no second person was ever named as the author." Pope's *Works,* VI, 197.

[28] "But now let us examine how he used Mr. Addison who at Mr. Congreve's Request (rather than to be baited any more by this Man-Tyger) became a subscriber to Dennis, for his two Volumes of Select

greve induced Addison to subscribe for Dennis's *Works*, which appeared in 1717. But we may question the further statement of this not unprejudiced biographer that in an interview with Rowe and Addison Dennis promised the former to burn some remarks on the sentiments of *Cato* and "never to engage in any Controversy against him." It is true that soon after the appearance of the *Remarks upon Cato* Dennis wrote some additional letters on the sentiments of the play, which he published with his correspondence in 1721. It is also true that the Mr. C—— who desired to examine the letters and received copies from Dennis some time about November 4, 1718,[29] may have been Congreve. But such an act is inconsistent with what we know of Dennis; and, moreover, these letters evidently had a history of which Wilson made no mention. Dennis states[30] that by a trick he had been "deprived of [his] copy of these letters" and his "friend of the original;" and he then adds the following hint:

> "By what Artifice these two Letters were got out of my Hands, by what Fortune I recovered the Substance of them, and how it came to take the form that it now has, I shall not here declare; not the first thro' regard for the Memory of the Dead; nor the two latter thro' Respect for the precious time of the Living."

Whatever may have been the incident to which the aging and sometimes oversuspicious critic alludes, it evidently did not destroy a certain esteem for Addison, for in the paragraph succeeding the lines just quoted Dennis expressed a desire to do justice to the memory of that writer, "who was certainly a Learned and very Ingenious Man: And several of the *Tattlers* and *Spectators* which were writ by him deserve the Applause they met with." Nor did Dennis later neglect the opportunity for criticizing a comparison at Addison's expense made in favor of Steele by Cibber. In his dedication of the *Heroic Daughter* to Steele Cibber made the unfortunate mistake of

Works, who promised him and Mr. Rowe, that he would burn some other Remarks upon Cato, which he had by him, and never again engage in any Controversy against him." *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Amours of William Congreve Esquire*, II, 136.

[29] *Original Letters*, preface.

[30] *Ibid.*

placing in Addison's mouth, as applicable to his relations with Steele as a writer, the speech of Marc Antony concerning Octavius from Dryden's *All for Love:*

> "Fool that I was Upon my Eagle's Wings
> I bore the Wren till I was tired of soaring,
> And now he mounts above me."

Dennis referred to this passage in the first of the Sir John Edgar letters, directed against Steele during their war in 1719–20, by declaring[31] sarcastically, "Cibber is to place you among the Gods, as the Romans did their Emperors, by making you fly like an Eagle to them." Steele confessed that this thrust provoked him to tears,[32] and he attempted to hit back; but the advantage on this point was clearly with Dennis.

Last of all we may note Dennis's criticisms of Addison's remarks on *Paradise Lost,* which our author included with the *Proposals for printing* his *Miscellaneous Tracts.* In these three letters of *Observations on the Paradise Lost of Milton, to Dr. S.,* the first of which is dated December 9, 1721, Dennis stated that Addison had made mention of the same beauties which he himself had noted many years before but had not given him any credit for observing them. Dennis declared, however, that he would have been willing to overlook this omission, if Addison had only done justice to Milton. The old critic then proceeded to reiterate his familiar statement that Milton's chief excellence lay in his sublimity and to show how the "Spectator" had failed to appreciate this vital piece of criticism. But the tone of these letters is far from bitter; and Dennis praised Addison in this his last utterance regarding that writer, as "the most ingenious if not the most learned" of the commentators on Milton.

Longer and more complicated than the history of Dennis's dealings with Addison is the less pleasant record of his relations with Steele, which began about 1700 with their coöperation in the reply to Blackmore's *Satire against Wit* and ended nearly a quarter of a century later with Dennis's *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers.* Steele's contribution to the answer

[31] The *Theatre,* II, 342.
[32] *Ibid.,* I, 101.

to Blackmore[83] was written in behalf of Addison, while Dennis was replying to the comparison of his wit with the gold on a gilded feather. There is every reason to believe that the two lived on friendly terms during the first decade of the eighteenth century, for Dennis spoke of the Captain as "my old friend," and he evidently exerted considerable influence in forming Steele's critical opinions.[84] In politics, too, they had a common interest, for they were both good whigs; and though Steele lived on a much more lavish scale, they were alike in the impecuniosity which put their friendship to the test of calling on each other in times of need. Indeed the first record of their relations after the collaboration against Blackmore is the previously mentioned letter of 1710,[85] sent by the embarrassed Dennis, which failed to evoke any reply from his equally improvident friend. Both of these men, however, were quick to respond to kind approaches and to forgive injuries, so it is probable that even after the incident just mentioned their pressing wants induced them occasionally to call upon each other for help.[86] For example, Dennis made the following statement in one of his letters to Steele:[87]

"Thou hast owed me these two years twelve Guineas for the first payment of twelve certain Receipts, which upon taking the Receipts, thou didst promise to pay in a Week. But since that time I never could see either the money or the Receipts; so that if I should enquire for thee, the answer that *Snug* thy servant would make, would certainly be, the Ghost will not appear today."[88]

[83] *Commendatory Verses on the Author of the Two Arthurs, and the Satire against Wit,* 1700.

[84] "Dennis . . . gab ohne Zweifel dem jüngeren und weniger gelehrten Steele . . . manche Anregung." Hamelius, Die *Kritik in der Englischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts,* Leipsic, 1897, p. 133.

[85] *Supra.*

[86] Possibly Dennis is acknowledging a loan from Steele in the following sentence in his letter to the *Spectator,* October 23, 1711: "About January last I happen'd to have an Obligation to a Certain Author, an Obligation which reposed a Trust in me which I have since discharged." An *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: with Several Letters of Criticism to the Spectator,* 1712, p. 65.

[87] The *Theatre,* II, 421.

[88] "It is said that having been bail for this gentleman [Dennis] he [Steele] was arrested on his default; and the only answer by his friend,

Steele's embarrassment with his creditors in 1714 afforded occasion for Swift to couple his name with that of our author in an imitation of Horace called *John Dennis the Sheltering Poet's Invitation to Richard Steele, the Secluded Party Writer, to come and live with him in the Mint.* Steele is here admonished to be mindful of Dennis's advice and to exchange his luxurious home from which he was unable to stir for the humble security of the Mint.

The humor of this poem is heightened by a knowledge of the relations then existing between Steele and Dennis; for it was published not many months after the "Cato" controversy, when the "Spectator" was saying unpleasant things about critics who had failed as authors. For most of these remarks Steele was blamed by Dennis, though they had really been the work of Addison. It is true that in the *Tatler* Steele had not hesitated to satirize the critics and had in at least one instance possibly given Dennis the cut direct;[39] but he had written neither the 40th nor the 70th *Spectators* credited to him in Dennis's replies to those numbers.[40] In fact none of the hits in the *Spectator* at the critic and his doctrines and peculiarities were written by Steele, so that, from one point of view at least, Dennis's resentment toward him as manifested in the letter *Upon the first publishing the Guardians,* was not his due.[41]

But the five years that followed so mellowed any resentment existing between the two that after Steele had been made patentee of the Drury-Lane theatre, he invited Dennis to

when he was informed of the circumstances was 'S'death: why did he not keep out of the way as I do!'" Ireland's *Hogarth,* II, 86. The story first appeared in the *Answer to a Whimsical Pamphlet, Called The Character of Sir John Edgar,* 1720, one of the most unfair attacks ever made on Dennis.

[39] "They took up the whole discourse; sometimes the Critic growing passionate, and when repremanded by the Wit of any Trip or hesitation in his Voice, he would answer, Mr. Dryden made such a character on such an Occasion break off in this same manner; so that the Stop was according to Nature as a Man in Passion should do." 29th *Tatler.* See also the 246th *Tatler.*

[40] *Original Letters,* pp. 57, 62.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 284.

dinner at his home, along with Cibber and Booth, there to read over the adaptation of *Coriolanus,* prepared so long before, with a view to staging it. Probably the suggestion of putting the *Invader* on the boards came from its hard pressed author; but be that as it may, the alteration was received kindly by the managers of the theatre, who promised to present the drama early the following season. The winter came, and Dennis waited anxiously but in vain for the staging of his play. Late in March, 1718, he wrote a strong but friendly letter of protest to Steele,[42] stating that he was overwhelmed with grief and sickness, and complaining that Sir Richard's "actually breaking [his] Word or being prefectly quiet while the Managers broke it," had brought him "within the apprehension of immediate necessity."

Dennis probably received a conciliatory answer, for on the fourth of the following September, about the time of the opening of the theatre, he sent to Steele the two volumes of his *Works* with a letter devoted for the most part to an explanation of his reasons for republishing his writings, but containing also a reminder of the wrongs he had suffered from the managers. It seems probable that it was through the intervention of the good hearted Steele that within the next month the parts of the play were given out and rehearsals began. Some of the parts were assigned in a way that irritated Dennis; but though he uttered a seemingly well grounded protest against the selection of the tenth of November as the opening night, since the town was then engrossed in preparations for the arrival of the King, he yielded in this matter, as in others, to the managers. That they might not conflict with the author's night at the Haymarket of Chas. Beckingham's *Henry IV of France,* the managers then induced Dennis, according to his own story,[43] to consent to put off the presentation of the *Invader;* but he was surprised when he learned from the bills that the postponement was for a single night only, thus bring-

[42] *Ibid.,* 103.

[43] Preface to the *Invader,* which furnishes most of our information concerning this affair.

ing his benefit on Friday, which he considered the worst day of the week.

Dennis also complained that the play had been withdrawn just in the midst of the confusion of the return of the King and parliament, at a juncture when it might be expected that a drama that had been paying expenses would, under improved conditions, soon prove profitable. It is to be noted, however, that the anonymous author of a *Critic no Wit; or Remarks on Mr. Dennis's Late Play,* 1720, states (p. 1), "I have been credibly inform'd that when your Third Night fail'd, thro' the Weakness of the Play, your own known Want of Merit, and the just Resentment of the Town, you have so often insolently abus'd, they generously offer'd to take that night upon themselves, and give you a Month's Time to make your own Interest; and then to take what Night or Play you thought fit." In weighing the evidence of this author, however, we must remember that his attack on Dennis is very bitter and in some other respects not very trustworthy. Furthermore, it is evident that the attitude of at least one of the managers of the theatre, Cibber, was not the most considerate, as is shown by the beginning of the epilogue he wrote for Mrs. Oldfield,[44] lines which Dennis might justly resent:

> "'Gad, I've a mind to Damn his Epilogue!
> His Play I need not—no poor wretched Elf!
> That Matter's Rug! He's done the Jobb himself!"[45]

"This play was acted on Wednesday," Dennis states in the preface, "to, an audience of £100, for so much they own'd to me. It was favorably received by the audience. There did some malice appear twice, but it was immediately drown'd by the utmost Clamours of Applause. On Thursday the Play was acted again to an Audience of between 50 and three score l. And on Friday to an Audience of between 60–70 l. Considering the disadvantages under which we lay, here was fair Hope for the Future. And on Friday, after the play was done, these tender-hearted Managers caused another to be given out, to the Astonishment of the Audience, the Disappointment of those who had reserved themselves for the sixth Day, and the Retrenching of 3 Parts in 4 of my Profits."

[44] In Cibber's *Lives of the Poets,* IV, 218, it is stated that Mrs. Oldfield "spoke with universal applause" this epilogue written by Colley Cibber, "for which poor, peevish, jealous Dennis abused them both."

[45] It is not surprising that after such back handed commendation Dennis should nurse his wrath against Cibber till it found expression at the be-

Our only other account of the reception of this play is that given in the fourth volume of Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*, p. 218:

"This piece met with some opposition on the first night; and on the fourth another play was given out. The second night's audience was very small, though the play was exceedingly well acted. The third night had not the charges in money; the fourth was still worse, and then another play was given out, not a place being taken in the boxes for the ensuing night."

It is interesting to compare this statement with Dennis's, and to notice how much more exact is that of our author.

It may be questioned whether Steele was in any way responsible for the hasty withdrawal of Dennis's play, for whatever interest he may have taken in the details of the management of the theatre probably suffered at this time from his absorption in the fierce political fight then waging. The Sunderland ministry, by whose grace Steele held his position as patentee of the theatre, were urging the bill for limiting the power of creating new peers; and Sir Richard, with a praiseworthy independence, was so prominent in resisting what he considered an unjust measure that he was chosen as the first speaker for an opposition which proved too strong for the ministry. Their defeat, however, left them in power, so they very naturally, if not very nobly, took Steele to task. The first punishment came in the form of an order from the Lord Chamberlain that Cibber should no longer act in the Theatre-Royal nor share in the

ginning of the next year in his letters to Steele *On the Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar* (Theatre, II, 339 ff.), where he attacked that actor so bitterly, especially on the ground of impiety, that Cibber is said to have inserted the following advertisement in Defoe's newspaper, the *Daily Post:* "Ten Pounds will be paid by Mr. Cibber at the Theatre-Royal to any Person who shall (by a legal Proof) discover the author of a pamphlet intituled, The Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar, &" (*Theatre*, II, 396, n.). Such an advertisement had, of course, but little terror for Dennis, who, two years later, again paid his respects in two short diatribes against Cibber, whom he addressed as Judas Iscariot (*Original Letters*, pp. 61, 70). Steele devoted the seventh number of the *Theatre* to a defense of Cibber's authorship of the *Fool of Fashion*, which had been questioned by Dennis and others. See also the *Original Letters*, p. 111.

management.[46] In taking such a step the ministry were acting within their legal rights, so Steele seized upon what was probably his most effective means of securing redress by beginning on January 2, 1719/20, a new journal called the *Theatre*.

In the meantime Dennis had published the *Invader* and had dedicated it to Newcastle, the Lord Chamberlain, who received the play graciously and ordered the writer a reward.[47] Early in December, 1719, the breech between Dennis and Steele was further widened by the appearance of an abusive tract[48] charging the critic with "Ill Nature, Ignorance, Impudence, and Self Sufficiency," which Dennis believed had been instigated by Sir Richard. Before the close of the month, therefore, our author published an onslaught on Steele, entitled the *Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar, calling himself sole Monarch of Drury-Lane; and his Three Deputy Governors; in Two Letters to Sir John Edgar.* This pamphlet discussed Steele's life, characterized his plays as adaptations of the works of other dramatists, and condemned bitterly his associate Cibber. Mr. Aitken calls[49] these letters venomous and in all probability hireling. The pamphlet, however, is much milder than the *Remarks of a School boy,* which had just appeared against the critic, and there is no proof that Dennis undertook the task upon any but his own initiative.

The first response evoked by these letters was an anonymous tract, much coarser and less just than Dennis's, bearing the

[46] The ground for this action, given in the *Answer to the Case of Sir Richard Steele, Theatre,* II, 532, was that in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Heroic Daughter* Cibber had abused his Majesty and the Ministry; that the Lord Chamberlain upon directing Cibber to assign a certain part to a certain actor, had been told "that it could not be done, because the part belonged to one of the Managers"; and that upon the Lord Chamberlain's insisting, Cibber had laughed and refused to obey.

[47] Dennis heard of Newcastle's direction through a friend who was present at the time the order was given. Owing to the machinations of one of the Duke's servants Dennis did not receive the gift till the latter part of March. *Theatre,* II, 402.

[48] A *Critic no Wit: or Remarks on Mr. Dennis's late Play, call'd the Invader of his Country. In a Letter from a School Boy to the Author,* 1720. Advertised in the *Post Boy* for December 1, 1719: "This day is published, A Critic no Wit; or Remarks on Mr. Dennis's late Play &c."

[49] *Life of Richard Steele,* 1889, II, 231.

title, An *Answer to a Whimsical Pamphlet, call'd The Character of Sir John Edgar, &, Humbly inscrib'd to Sir Tremendous Longinus. Written by Sir John Edgar's Baker, mention'd in the Third Theatre.* "Owl," "Mongrel cur," and "Pole cat" are among the names bestowed upon Dennis in this, the most grossly personal tract of the whole controversy. Steele himself took no notice of Dennis's letters to Sir John Edgar before the eleventh and twelfth numbers of the *Theatre,* February 6 and 9, 1720. Then, acting on his belief that most enemies may best be conquered by laughing at them, he indulged in a good deal of banter, though the tone of his papers is, on the whole, little superior to that of Dennis's letters.[50]

Toward the close of March Dennis addressed to the Duke of Newcastle his third and fourth Edgar letters.[51] In almost every controversy the disputants are likely to grow less judicial with the progress of the argument, and Dennis's pamphlet shows him no exception to the rule. It is, however, much more moderate than the tract by Sir John Edgar's Baker mentioned above; and if some of the shots, such as that at Steele's English as Hibernian, fall short of the mark, others, such as the thrust at his military record, must be confessed palpable hits.

This same month, March 29th, Steele published in pamphlet form an account of the differences between himself and the Lord Chamberlain,[52] which was answered some ten days later

[50] Others were drawn into this contest with Steele, of whom the most prominent was the writer for *Applebee's,* who signed his unimpassioned and pedantic articles by the name "Sir Andrew Artlove." The title of his letters reads, A *Full Consideration and Confutation of Sir John Edgar, By Sir Andrew Artlove, Knight and Baronet. In Three Letters to Mr. Applebee.* These appeared in *Applebee's Original Journal,* February 13, 20 and 27, 1720 and were republished by Nichols in the *Theatre,* II, 450 ff. Far more judicial and fair minded was the writer of the *Anti-Theatre,* a journal of which fifteen numbers have been preserved. See the *Theatre,* II, 227–313.

[51] The *Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar and his Three Deputy Governors, during the Administration of the late Separate Ministry. In a Third and Fourth Letter to the Knight. With a Picture of Sir John, Drawn with a Pen, After the Life,* 1720.

[52] The *State of the Case between the Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household and the Governor of the Royal Company of Comedians.*

by an anonymous tract which Mr. Aitken considers Dennis's.[53] He bases his belief largely upon the following statement in the pamphlet:

"I have not room here to take notice of his unjust and barbarous treatment of Gentlemen of merit and learning during the whole course of his Administration whose plays he has not only kept from being read and acted, but could not be prevailed within six years to return them to their authors."

It is true, as Mr. Aitken observes,[54] that Dennis could write feelingly upon such a matter, for he himself had suffered thus with his *Invader;* but it may be replied that this anonymous author did not write with anything like the warmth Dennis exhibited at this stage of the controversy. It is also to be added that this pamphlet attacked Etheredge's *Man of Mode,* which Dennis was soon to praise at the expense of Steele's *Conscious Lovers.* Again, it seems to the present writer at least, the diction of this tract is marked by few or none of Dennis's pet phrases; and even the most casual reader will perceive that the style lacks that stamp of virility so notable in almost all of the critic's work. Against Dennis's authorship of the pamphlet may also be urged the statement in its opening paragraph: "The reader must know, that I have not the honour of the least acquaintance with his Grace [the Duke of Newcastle] nor am I at all known to him." While we must admit, of course, that few of the pamphleteers of the time were above lying to throw the reader off the scent, we must also remember that Dennis has never been convicted of a deliberate falsehood.

There now ensued a lull in the quarrel between Dennis and Steele, broken only by the former's shot at Cibber in the letter to Cromwell[55] concerning the authorship of the *Fool of Fashion.* Dennis added the *Invader* to the 1721 edition of his

With the Opinions of Pemberton, Northey, and Parker, concerning the Theatre. Steele here maintained that Newcastle was infringing upon his legal rights; and he estimated that the intrusion had lost him some £9800.

[53] The *State of the Case between the Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household and Sir Richard Steele, as represented by that Knight, re-stated, in vindication of King George, and the most Noble Duke of Newcastle.*

[54] Aitken's *Life of Richard Steele,* II, 231.

[55] *Original Letters,* p. 138.

Works, thus showing that he maintained a good opinion of the play despite its reception; and in the same year he published a part of his correspondence with Steele in his *Original Letters.* There was, however, no further serious outbreak till November, 1722, when the critic's wrath was aroused by the manner in which Steele's forthcoming drama, the *Conscious Lovers,* was being advertised. "His Play has been trotted as far as Edinburg northward, and as far as Wales westward," Dennis declared.[56] And he added, "Now Advertisements have been sent to the Newspapers to the Effect that the Comedy in Rehersal is, in the Opinion of Excellent Judges, the very best that ever came on the English Stage." This gentle art of advertising kindled Dennis's habitual resentment to cabals, so, with a lamentable lack of discretion, he proceeded to show that the play would be worthless because the writer knew nothing of the nature of comedy.[57] In support of his contention Dennis reverted to the 65th *Spectator,* published a dozen years before, where Steele had attacked Etheredge's *Sir Fopling Flutter* chiefly on moral grounds. In his pamphlet the critic maintained the idea familiar in his time that ridicule is the proper object of comedy as terror and pity of tragedy; that comedy instructs through its characters; and that in representing Sir Fopling Flutter Etheredge had drawn a character which made vice ridiculous. Though this is on the whole a well written criticism, free from the bitterness that had marked many of the preceding pamphlets, Steele's friends were so forward in his defense that Dennis afterwards stated[58] that "instead of meeting with Thanks which I expected . . . I found myself in the same situation which Surley was, upon discovering the Cheat in the Alchymist."

[56] Preface to the *Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter.*

[57] A *Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter, A Comedy Written by Sir George Etheredge. In which Defense is shewn, that Sir Fopling, that Merry Knight, was rightly compos'd by the Knight his Father, to answer the Ends of Comedy; and that he has been barbarously and scurrilously attack'd by the Knight his Brother, in the 65th Spectator. By which it appears That the Latter Knight knows nothing of the Nature of Comedy,* London, 1722.

[58] Preface to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers.*

Dennis's pamphlet appeared on the 2nd of November, 1722; five days later the *Conscious Lovers* was acted with great success; and on the 29th of the same month was published an *Epistle to Sir Richard Steele on his Play called the Conscious Lovers, By B. Victor.* This last named writer was a young man who had just been introduced to Steele and was, according to his own later account,[59] readily induced to reply to Dennis. His pamphlet need not detain us longer than to note that he called Dennis "Apemantus, the Man Hater," who with "a certain cant of words"—"has set up for a formidable and judicious Critick";[60] and that he attributes to Dennis the adage, "He who will make a pun will pick a pocket."[61] When

[59] *History of the Theatre of London and Dublin, From the Year 1730 to the Present Time,* 1761, I, 97. *Cf.* D. N. B. *sub* Victor.

[60] *Cf. c.* Addison's remarks on Dennis in the 253rd *Spectator, Supra.*

[61] "Mr. Purcell and Mr. Congreve going into a Tavern, by chance met De—s, who went in with 'em; after a glass or two had pass'd, Mr. Purcell having some private business with Mr. Congreve, wanted De—s out of the Room, and not knowing a more certain Way than Punning (for you are to understand, Sir, that Mr. De—s is as much surpris'd at a Pun as at a Bailiff) he proceeded after the following Manner: he pull'd the Bell, and call'd 2 or 3 Times, but no one answering, he put his hand under the Table and looking full at Dennis he said, I think this Table is like the Tavern; says De—s (with his usual profane Phrase) God's death, Sir, How is this Table like the Tavern? Why, says Mr. Purcell, because there is no Drawer in it.

"Says De—s (Starting up) God's death Sir, the Man that would make such an execrable Pun as that in my Company, would pick my Pocket, and so left the Room."

This story is quoted in *Notes and Queries,* 6th Series, XI, 511.

The town seems to have been well acquainted with Dennis's aversion to puns, for the laughs on that score at his expense are not infrequent. One of the most notable of these references is that by Fielding in his *Annotations of H. Scriblerus Secundus,* accompanying his *Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great:* "The man who writ this wretched pun, says Mr. D—, would pick your pocket; which he proceeds to show not only bad in itself but doubly so on this solemn occasion. And yet in that excellent play of Liberty Asserted we find something very much resembling a pun in the mouth of a Mistress who is parting with the lover she is fond of:

'Ul. Oh mortal woe! one kiss and then farewell.

Dennis published the defense of Sir Fopling Flutter he declared that he should later criticize Steele's new comedy; and he fulfilled this promise the following January[62] by issuing his *Remarks on a Play, call'd The Conscious Lovers, a Comedy.* Dennis here defended himself against the charge of ill nature[63] and maintained that, as Steele and his company had done him wrongs that did not fall within the cognizance of the law, he was in a state of nature for getting what justice he could. The criticism itself, however, is practically free from any personal abuse and is devoted largely to comparing the *Conscious Lovers* with its source, Terrence's *Andria.* These *Remarks* do not constitute a great piece of criticism, but they form one of the most judicial pamphlets of the entire controversy.

On the thirteenth of December, 1722,[64] appeared a tract against Dennis less moderate than Victor's, in which almost the only pretense to criticism is that made in the title: *Sir Richard Steele and his New Comedy, call'd the Conscious Lovers, vindicated from the malicious Aspersions of Mr. John Dennis, Wherein Mr. Dennis's vile Criticisms in Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter are Detected and Exposed, and the Author of them Shewn to Know Nothing of Criticism.* One sentence, chosen almost at random, may be quoted to show the nature of nearly the entire pamphlet: "Men set up for critics, who have no other Recommendation [but ill nature] . . . they snarl, and under correction they bark, and if they themselves cannot sing, they are resolved to bark outrageously."

Quite different from this vindication of Steele was another

Irene. The Gods have given to others to fare well,
O miserably must Irene fare.' "

The *Complete Works of Henry Fielding,* New York, 1902, II, 40.

[62] Published on the 24th of January, 1723 (*Daily Journal*). The *British Journal,* Sat., Jan. 19, 1723, advertises for Monday these *Remarks.* The *Post Boy* of Jan. 26, 1723, advertises it for "this day."

[63] "The Truth of the affair is, that no English Author of any note has commended as many English Poets as I have. I shall give a list some of these: Shakespere, Ben Johnson, Milton, Butler, Roscommon, Denham, Waller, Dryden, Wycherley, Otway, Etheredge, Shadwell, Crown, Philips." Preface to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers.*

[64] Aitken's *Life of Richard Steele,* II, 284.

pamphlet which appeared in 1723 called the *Censor Censured,*[65] a dialogue in which Jack Freeman (Dennis had given this name to the principal speaker in his *Impartial Critick* and had dedicated his *Iphigenia* to his friend Mr. John Freeman) indicated the weaknesses of Steele's play in an unprejudiced and somewhat humorous manner. Toward the close of the dialogue Dennis is represented as entering. Freeman proceeds to show that the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers* are no better than the play itself, whereupon Dennis retorts, "I must tell you in plain terms that you have no more sense than the Knight."

With this pamphlet ended the four years of controversy. The managers of the theatre soon came to quarrel among themselves; and the remaining six years of Steele's life were filled with litigation, sickness, and debt. We possess no record of further relations between him and Dennis, and it may be doubted if there were any. In the history that has just been sketched there is comparatively little that reflects discredit upon Steele, and not so much as has been generally believed on Dennis. That the old critic should have felt himself wronged is perfectly explicable. It is unfair to characterize his retorts as the blows of a flail,[66] as has been done by one writer, or to state that he was constantly the aggressor. For the most part the relations between Dennis and Steele during these twenty-five years were amicable. These peaceful times, however, leave but little to record, so that in emphasizing the quarrels of a few months or years, we are likely to lose sight of the long periods of friendship between these two impetuous and impecunious associates.

Quite different from his relations with Steele were those of Dennis with Swift; for, if we accept the critic's own statement,[67] he was a stranger to the great satirist in 1711, and after that time would probably have refused to meet him. We

[65] The *Censor Censured or the Conscious Lovers Examined; In a Dialogue between Sir Dicky Marplot and Jack Freeman. In which Mr. Dennis is Introduced by Way of Postscript; with some observations on his late Remarks.*

[66] The *Theatre,* II, 370.

[67] "I thank my God I am altogether a stranger to thy person." *Original Letters,* p. 298.

have already noticed Swift's thrust at the critic in the *Tale of a Tub,* where he characterized Dennis as the son of Momus and Hybris. Our author took no notice of this hit; nor did he make any answer when, two years later, Swift published the story of the French privateer[68] in his *Thoughts on Various Subjects.* He did, however, reply promptly and furiously when the writer of the *Examiner* for January 10, 1711/12, assigned to him the authorship of a tract in defense of Marlborough,[69] stating that "from the style of the pamphlet, and the manifest thefts from his own unlucky plays, an old sour critic must be the author, though the tract was fairly printed in large characters, and avoided in outward circumstances all appearance of Grub Street."

Dennis retorted[70] by calling Swift "a Joker in a long party colored Coat," "an arrant Fool," and an "ecclesiastical Jack Pudding," who had denied the very being of God. The language was coarse and brutal; but Dennis was only replying to such phrases as "the most insipid and contemptible of all human Creatures," delivered by his unprovoked assailant. In all probability Swift did not write that particular number of the *Examiner,* though he was doubtlessly willing to take the responsibility. In the latter part of April, 1714, he published his *John Dennis the Sheltering Poet's Invitation to Sir Richard Steele, the Secluded Party Writer, to come and live with him in the Mint,* which, though directed primarily against Steele, did not neglect bestowing a generous portion of ridicule upon the critic. With this *Invitation* the relations between Dennis and Swift practically closed; for while there were later a few chance shots,[71] the London recluse and the Irish dean never again came into conflict.

[68] *Supra.*

[69] The *Management of the War.* Francis Hare is regarded as the author of this tract, but Maynwaring probably had a share in it.

[70] *Original Letters,* p. 296.

[71] "Who have been the Prose-Authors that have been most in Vogue? Why Abel [Roper] and the *Examiner,* par nobile fratrum: whose Rhetorick has been Billingsgate, and whose Reasons have been Impudence." *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer,* p. 3. See also Pope's *Works,* VIII, 309, and Scott's *Swift,* IX, 375. It is possible that Swift may have been responsible for some of the hits at Dennis in *Peri Bathous.*

Dennis's brief and somewhat casual conflicts with Swift sink into insignificance when compared with the long and bitter strife he waged with Pope—a series of quarrels that cover a quarter of a century and stand to most readers as the critic's principal, if not his sole, claim to remembrance. It was probably in the latter years of the first decade of the eighteenth century that Pope, then a youth, in seeking the acquaintance of the men of letters of the town, prevailed upon his much older friend Henry Cromwell to introduce him to Dennis, who received him civilly but apparently without any special interest. The critic's own account of their meeting and of Pope's subsequent attack reads as follows:[72]

"At his first coming to town he was very importunate with the late Mr. Henry Cromwell to introduce him to me. The Recommendation of Mr. Cromwell induced me to be about thrice in his Company, after which I went into the Country and never saw or thought of him, till I found myself attacked by him in the very superficial Essay on Criticism."

In his *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism* Dennis gives us a hint as to the cause of his differences with Pope,[73] when he calls that author "an eternal writer of Amorous Pastoral Madrigals," referring probably to his adverse opinion of Pope's artificial pastorals. This hint is strengthened by the evidence of a passage from Pope's *Prologue to the Satires:*[74]

"Soft were my Numbers, who could take offense,
While pure description held the place of sense:
Like gentle Fanny's was my flow'ry theme,
A painted mistress or a purling stream.
Yet then did Dennis rave with furious fret:
I never answered,—I was not in debt."

Pope was prompt to resent Dennis's disapproval of his poems and was not over nice in the means he employed against his critic. In his physical and temperamental peculiarities Dennis offered a chance for satire which Pope quickly improved in his

[72] This passage, as well as a large part of the subsequent narration of the relations of Dennis and Pope, is based upon the critic's story of his dealings with his arch enemy as given in his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Dunciad*, 1729, pp. 39 ff.

[73] See Pope's *Works*, IV, 74, and VIII, 11–12.

[74] *Ibid.*, II, 12.

Essay on Criticism. Not only did he include such open thrusts as "Appius" reddening and the hit at the tremendous stare, but he also directed against Dennis some more covert blows.[75]

It is little wonder then that with such provocation Dennis immediately wrote some *Reflections* upon the *Essay*[76] and published them as soon as he could. Nor was his resentment lessened by his belief that Pope had made this "clandestine" attack on his person as a part of a scheme "to destroy the reputation of a man who had published certain pieces of criticism, and to set up his own." Moreover, Dennis felt an added resentment that the onslaught should have been made at a time "when all the world knew" that he "was suffering great misfortunes." And, as the attack had been made on his person, he retorted thus in turn to the "young squab," who was a "fine fellow to make personal remarks about another." For the most part, however, Dennis confined himself to a consideration of the *Essay,* devoting no small part of his time to criticizing single lines or couplets. Though some of his remarks are mere cavils, twisting the text from its obvious meaning, he shrewdly recognized that Pope's power of expression frequently surpassed his power of thought, and he was quick to perceive the equivocal manner in which such words as "nature" and "wit" had been used, and to take the author to task. Near the close of the *Remarks* Dennis stated that he had lately drawn a graphic picture of Pope, but that he believed that he should "keep the Dutch piece from ever seeing the light."

[75] Pope went to the trouble of pointing out at least one such allusion. In his *Strange Narrative of Dr. Norris* he had this sentence: "That the said Mr. John Dennis on the 27th of March, 1712, finding on the said Mr. Lintot's counter a book called an Essay on Criticism, just then published, he read a page or two of it with much frowning, till he came to these two lines:

> Some have at first for wits, then poets past,
> Turned critics next, and prov'd plain fools at last.

He flung the book down in a terrible fury, and cried out, *By God* he means me."

[76] *Remarks upon the Dunciad,* p. 39, on which the statements immediately following are also based.

Despite his protest to the contrary,[77] Pope was so deeply cut that he really never forgave the writer; but he was wise enough to profit by some of Dennis's hints, and in the light of this criticism to revise several lines.[78] He made no direct reply to Dennis, but with that deliberate malice which so often characterized him, went to work to secure his revenge. About this time began his friendship with the good natured and inoffensive Gay, whom he soon came to use for fighting his battles. In May, 1712, four months after the publication of the *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism* appeared Gay's *Mohocks,* preceded by an insulting dedication to Dennis of this play which was both "Horrid and Tremendous." Our belief that the dedication was directed in retalliation for Pope is strengthened by the following allusion it contains to the favorable

[77] "Did you never mind what your angry critics published against you? Never much: only one or two things at first.—When I heard for the first time that Dennis had written against me, it gave me some pain; but it was quite over when I came to look in his book, and found him in such a passion." Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations, and Characters of Books and Men,* London, 1820, p. 275.

[78] The following lines criticized by Dennis were afterwards altered by Pope. Of course it does not necessarily follow in each instance that Dennis's criticism was the sole, or even the main, reason for Pope's making the change.

I, 75, "That art is best that most resembles her,
Which still presides but never does appear,"
was changed to
"Art from that fund each just supply provides,
Works without show, and without pomp presides."

I, 80, "There are whom Heav'n hath bless'd with store of Wit,
Yet want as much again to manage it."
changed to
"Some to whom Heav'n in Wit has been profuse,
Want as much more to turn it to its use."

I, 82, "For Wit and Judgment ever are at strife,"
"ever" changed to "often."

I, 179, "Those are best Stratagems which Errors seem,"
"are best" to "oft are."

II, 503, "The more his Trouble [Wit] as the more admir'd,
When wanted scorn'd, and envied when acquir'd."
became
"Then more our Trouble still when most admir'd,
And still the more we give, the more requir'd."

mention of the *Essay on Criticism* which had appeared in the 253d *Spectator:* "As we look upon you to have a Monopoly of English Criticism in your Head, we hope that you will shortly chastise the Insolence of the Spectator, who has lately had the Audacity to shew that there are more Beauties than Faults in a Modern Writer." Beyond his friendship for Pope, no other reason has been assigned for this hit of Gay's at Dennis, who, so far as we know, never mentioned or alluded to the author of the *Mohocks* in any of his writings. Two years later Gay returned to his attack upon Dennis in his sarcastic remarks about critics and poetic justice delivered in the preface to his *What-d'-ye-Call-It;* and he afterwards collaborated with Pope and Arbuthnot in satirizing Dennis in the deservedly unsuccessful *Three Hours After Marriage,* which we shall notice later.

In the meantime Pope was nursing his wrath and waiting for other opportunities to take vengeance upon Dennis, one of which came with his pretended defense of Addison in the *Narrative of . . . the Strange Frenzy of Mr. John Dennis,* dated July 30, 1714. As has already been indicated, this coarse and cowardly attack made no reply to the charges brought against Addison's play, and very insultingly ridiculed the old critic. On his part Dennis continued to guard jealously the memory of Dryden as opposed to the growing fame of this young bard of the "monotonous Couplets"; and in 1715, when he heard from Tonson that Pope and his friends had set on foot a conspiracy against the reputation of Dryden, he wrote to the bookseller a strong letter against "these Authors of great Mediocrity, whose Absurdities," he said, he had "exposed openly and fairly, and upon just and personal Provocations."

Pope was now busy with his translation of Homer, of which the first four books appeared in 1715, and nothing occurred to break the armed neutrality till May, 1716, when there appeared a furious tract, a *True Character of Mr. Pope,* very probably by Dennis. This diatribe was evoked by an anonymous *Imitation of Horace* which had probably been directed against the critic. The offending poem, however, has never been discovered.[79] Though the authorship of the *True Character* has

[79] See Pope's *Works,* VIII, 11.

never been quite definitely settled, it was very probably the work of Dennis.[80] Possibly this is the Dutch portrait of which he speaks in the *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism,*[81] as prepared to be held in reserve. Curll once stated that Gildon wrote the *True Character,* but he afterwards transferred the honor to Dennis.[82] Pope once professed to consider the tract the joint work of Gildon and Dennis,[83] but our author de-

[80] Mr. Roberts, in the *Bookworm,* IV, 375, states his conviction that the "internal evidence does not warrant the assumption that Dennis could stoop so low." To this it may be replied that some of the critic's later attacks are about as abusive as is the *True Character.* Moreover, the sentiments expressed near the close of the pamphlet on the possibilities of translating Homer into a modern tongue are almost precisely those voiced in Dennis's *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer* (see especially pp. 10–11). The writer of the *True Character* promised to make some observations on Pope's translation, a task which Dennis afterwards accomplished. Again, the likes and prejudices of the author of this tract are those of the critic; there is a quotation from Dennis's almost inevitable *Hudibras* and from his almost equally favorite Horace; reference is made to Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia,* which was a favorite play with our author; Blackmore and his works are highly praised by this writer, just at the time when the strongest friendship had grown up between the physician and Dennis; here, as in the *Reflection upon the Essay on Criticism,* Pope is admitted to possess some skill as a versifier; he is also compared with Boileau, a contrast which Dennis afterwards developed at length in his *Remarks upon the Dunciad;* the writer accuses Pope of being an imitator in all his productions—of Vergil in the *Bucolics,* of Boileau in the *Rape of the Lock,* of Denham in *Windsor Forest,* of Dryden in the *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day,* and of Chaucer in the *Temple of Fame,* strictures which Dennis repeated in practically all his attacks upon Pope (see, for example, the *Daily Journal,* May 11, 1728); the style of the pamphlet is marked by a notable use of contrast, a favorite device with the critic; some of the phrases employed, such as "fool and knave," always in that order, and "assertor of liberty" have a familiar ring to one who has read much of Dennis; and, still more important, this pamphlet contains the first recorded hint as to the authorship of Pope's *Strange Frenzy*—"Who wrote a prolog in praise of Cato, and teas'd Lintot to publish Remarks on it?" To this we may add that "in the *Testimonies of Authors,* prefixed to the *Dunciad* [*e.g.,* Pope's *Works,* IV, 74], and in the Appendix, and throughout the Notes, Dennis is uniformly quoted and attacked as the author" (*Notes and Queries,* 1st Series, Vol. IV, 94).

[81] *Supra.*

[82] *Bookworm,* IV, 357.

[83] *Works,* IV, 72.

clared that they had never written a single line together.[84] The *True Character* itself reflects but little credit upon its author with its abuse of Pope as shaped like a monkey and other such genial personalities. It is, however, often acute, especially in puncturing Pope's mock humility and in exposing his vanity, all with a brutal frankness that probably cut him the deeper because he recognized the truth in the analysis.

Pope renewed the attack, again behind the shield of Gay, by producing in connection with that writer and Arbuthnot the farce *Three Hours After Marriage,* which was staged in 1717, nominally as the work of Gay. Several persons were here satirized, including Lady Winchilsea as Clinkett the poetess, Cibber as Plotwell, and Dennis as Sir Tremendous Longinus the Critic. There is little remarkable about the play except its tameness and meagerness. In reading such criticisms as the *Comparison Between the Two Stages,* one laughs at the keenness and truth of some of the thrusts at Dennis; but the satire of the *Three Hours,* representing the critic as all praise for the ancients and blame for the moderns, and as strict for the rules, fails to hit home. The play met with a storm of hostile criticism and was soon withdrawn, much to the mortification of Pope.

Early in the same month, January, 1717, which witnessed the failure of the *Three Hours,* Theobald printed in the thirty-third number of the *Censor,* which he was then publishing, an attack on Dennis as "a sour, ill-natured Critick." He ended the article with a eulogy of Pope's translation of the first eight books of the *Iliad.* Theobald, who was sometimes pressed for copy, may have heard Dennis in one of the coffee houses discussing the new translation and have seized upon this opportunity to berate the critic and to praise Pope. At least this seems the most plausible explanation, for Dennis had given no known cause for this attack on him as the "modern Furius," who was filled with ill nature and roughly assaulted successful merit.

In closing his paper Theobald had prophesied that he should have "Critic Furius" upon his back, nor was he mistaken;

[84] *Infra,* p. 95 n.

for in the next month when Dennis published his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer*,[85] he paid his respects to the "Censor" as a "notorious Idiot, one Hight Whacum, who from an under-spur Leather of the Law, is become an understrapper to the play-house." Dennis, however, bestowed but a passing notice on Theobald, choosing rather to take vengeance upon Pope.[86] Naturally a piece of criticism written for revenge cannot be considered work of a very high order; but mixed with the petty cavils at Pope's choice of words are many just censures of a translation that is often inexact and inappropriate. The modern student who peruses Dennis's criticism carefully cannot fail to be impressed with the penetration and rightness of his judgments of the large features of the translation. Such, for example are the remarks upon the possibility of translating Homer into English verse, which anticipate much of what Matthew Arnold had to say on that subject, and a condemnation of the monotony of the heroic couplet which resembles Lowell's comment on Pope's use of that form of verse. "The HOMER which Lintot prints," Dennis asserted, "does not talk like Homer, but like Pope;" and he then went on to compare the simplicity of the original with the artificiality of the translation. Of far less value than these *Remarks upon Homer* are those upon *Windsor Forest* and the *Temple of Fame* included in the same little volume. Dennis described *Windsor Forest* as a wretched rhapsody, unworthy the observations of a man of sense; and he then proceeded to devote several pages to a discussion of it. Much of his space is taken up with a comparison of this poem with Denham's *Cooper's Hill*. Of the observations upon the *Temple of Fame* it may suffice to note that Dennis here enters into a pedantic discussion of the nature of dreams, and that, as Dr. Johnson has

[85] *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer. With Two Letters concerning Windsor Forest and the Temple of Fame.* London, 1717. Advertised in the *Daily Courant*, for Feb. 9th.

[86] "I afterwards wrote and published some Remarks upon Part of his Translation of Homer, upon his Windsor Forest and upon his infamous Temple of Fame. When I had done this, I thought that I had reason to be satisfied with the Revenge I had taken." *Remarks upon the Dunciad*, p. 39.

observed in his comments upon Pope, the best remark in the criticism is that "Trees starting from their roots, and mountains rolling into a wall, and a town rising like an exhalation, are things not to be shown in sculpture."

Despite his fabricated letter to Congreve, declaring himself indifferent to any abuse from Dennis,[87] Pope was deeply cut by the *Remarks,* so, as an offset to them and to the recent failure of the *Three Hours,* he welcomed, if he did not invite, the assistance of his friend Parnell, who published during the following May his *Homer's Battle of the Frogs and Mice. With the Remarks of Zoilus. To which is prefixed, The Life of the Said Zoilus.* This satire was directed against Dennis and, rather retributively it would seem after the number of the *Censor* just discussed, against Theobald. Why the latter should have been chosen for ridicule is not quite clear, unless it was for his disapproval of the *Three Hours* and as a good representative of poor, unfortunate authors. Pope wrote to Parnell at this time,[88] "Gay's play has cost much time and long suffering to stem the tide of malice and party that certain authors have raised against it. The best revenge upon such fellows is now in my hands, I mean your Zoilus, which really transcends the expectation I had conceived of it." Parnell's criticism, while more extended and exhaustive than most of those made against Dennis, followed closely along the old lines of accusations of envy and snarling, of a pedantic regard for

[87] "My spleen was not occasioned, however, by anything an abusive angry critic could write of me. ('Dennis, who writ an abusive pamphlet that year, entitled Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer.')" "I take very kindly your heroic manner of congratulation upon this scandal: for I think nothing more honourable than to be involved in the same fate with all the great and good that ever lived, that is, to be envied and censured by bad writers." Pope to Congreve, January 16, 1714–15.

The editors of Pope's *Works,* VI, 411, go on to comment thus: "Unfortunately for Pope's consistency, he states that he refers in a letter dated January, 1715, to Dennis's pamphlet on his Homer, when the next letter but one, which is dated April, says that the first part of the translation was not yet published. It did not, in fact, appear till June, and Dennis's Remarks did not follow till February, 1717. Pope omitted the note in the quarto, and as he was unable to particularize any abuse of himself which came out in January, 1715, he left the allusion unexplained."

[88] *Works,* VIII, 464.

verbal criticism, and of a proneness to see faults and to disregard beauties. Pope must have valued the *Zoilus* highly, for after Parnell's death he reprinted it, "corrected by Mr. Pope," after the fifth book of his translation of the *Odyssey*.

After the appearance of the *Zoilus* in May, 1717, came an armistice in this long war between Pope and Dennis, of which the latter has given the following account:[89]

"As these several Remarks [upon *Homer, Windsor Forest,* and the *Temple of Fame*] had made great Impressions upon the Minds of Persons of undoubted Sense, and so esteem'd by the Publick, P. began to repent the Affront he had offer'd me, and the Injury he had attempted to do me: And to give some Proofs of his Repentance, he subscrib'd to the Two Volumes of Select Works, almost in spite of my Friend Mr. Henry Cromwell, in whose hands he found the Proposals. He likewise subscrib'd afterwards to the two Volumes of Letters, which engaged me to strike out several very just and severe Reflections against him."[90]

The two authors exchanged civil letters, each expressing regret for the past; and Dennis came to feel that, while he could never be Pope's friend, he was willing to cease to be his enemy. This neutrality was maintained for about ten years; and even in 1727 Pope's name appeared upon the small list of subscribers to Dennis's *Miscellaneous Tracts,* at the time he was preparing with Arbuthnot the *Peri Bathous, Martin Scriblerus, his treatise on the art of sinking in poetry,* which appeared in 1728 as the third volume of Pope and Swift's *Miscellanies.* In this preliminary study to the *Dunciad* Dennis received a

[89] *Remarks upon the Dunciad,* p. 39.

[90] The following passages were omitted by Dennis from the letter to Tonson in 1715 regarding the conspiracy against the reputation of Dryden: "But when I heard that this attempt to lessen Mr. Dryden's was done in favour of *little Pope, that diminutive of Parnassus and of humanity,* . . . and the *little Mr. Pope* to *the illustrious Mr. Dryden;* . . . But Pope is the very reverse of all this; he scarce ever once thought solidly, but is an empty eternal babbler; and his thoughts are almost always false and trifling, his expression is too often obscure, ambiguous and uncleanly. He has indeed a smooth Verse and rhyming Jingle, but he has no power or variety of Harmony; but always the same dull cadence, and a continual bag-pipe drone. Mr. Dryden's Expression was always worthy of his Thoughts, but Pope never speaks or thinks at all; or what is all one, his Language is frequently as barbarous as his Thoughts are false." Dennis then went on, in a passage which he also omitted later to show that Pope's fame was due to popular error.

goodly share of attention along with most of the poets and poetasters of his time, being classed with Gildon and Oldmixon as the representatives of the porpoise poets.[91] The last chapter of this book consists of a burlesque project of twelve rules for the advancement of the stage, purporting to be the digest of a scheme made public in 1720 by Dennis and Gildon for encouraging poor authors and for fostering a right dramatic taste.[92] So far as abuse is concerned, there is little to choose between Pope's treatment of Dennis in the work just mentioned and that in the *Dunciad,* which was published a month later, May, 1728. Though he fared better than did some of Pope's other victims, Dennis was ridiculed in half a dozen passages, ranging in length and severity from the "thunder rumbling in a mustard bowl," to the eight lines descriptive of his participation in the diving contest, "In naked Majesty great Dennis stands, etc."[93]

The story of the numerous replies evoked by the *Dunciad* is too well known to require any extended repetition. Dennis at once published his *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock,*[94] which he had written a dozen years before, but which he had held back *"In Terrorem."* In many ways this is one of the

[91] "The porpoises are unwieldy and big; they put all their members into a great turmoil and tempest, but whenever they appear in plain sight (which is seldom) they are only shapeless and ugly monsters." Chapter VI.

[92] Mr. Aitken states in his *Life of Richard Steele,* II, 234, that A *New Project for the Regulation of the Stage* was advertised on February 5, 1713, and that it reached a second edition, but that he never had seen the book. Beyond this statement and the allusion in Pope, just mentioned above, the present writer has been able to find little. It is also to be noted that in his *Remarks upon the Dunciad,* p. 50, Dennis declares that he never wrote any such book with Gildon: "As Mr. P. has been pleas'd in several Places of his wonderful *Rhapsody* [the *Dunciad*] to declare that I wrote such and such things in Concert with Mr. *Gildon* I solemnly declare upon the Word and Honour of a Gentleman, that I never so much as wrote one Line that was afterwards printed in concert with any one Man whatsoever."

[93] ll. 283 ff. Pope afterwards transferred these lines to Oldmixon.

[94] *Remarks on Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock. In Several Letters to a Friend. With a Preface. Occasion'd by the late Treatise on the Profound and the Dunciad.* London, 1728.

least happy of his efforts in criticism; for while the personalities included are not so stinging as might be expected from one with his provocation, and while some of his remarks, as Dr. Johnson has observed, are not easy to answer, the critic's mind was far too literal, and far too unsympathetic, to judge the poem aright. At this juncture he also published in the *Daily Journal* for the eleventh of May, 1728, an anonymous "Letter against Mr. Pope at Large," wherein he repeated his accusations against that poet as an imitator of Chaucer, Denham, Dryden, and Boileau, characterized his style as mean and low, and declared that as a writer of pastorals he fell far short of Philips.[95]

In the earlier months of this same year appeared a small pamphlet *Pope Alexander's Supremacy and Infallibility examin'd; and the Errors of Scriblerus and his Man William Detected. With the Effigies of his Highness and his Prime Minister, Curiously Engraved in Copper,* London, 1729. This tract consists of two anonymous latters, one of them very moderate and judicial, the other decidedly abusive, preceded by an engraving representing Pope as an ape, with an ass below—his prime minister, Will Cleland. This pamphlet has been accredited to Dennis and George Duckett, though apparently without a very careful investigation of its authorship. Pope, who was very shrewd in guessing the origin of attacks against himself, wrote to Oxford,[96]

"I see a book with a curious cut; called Pope Alexander's Supremacy &c 4to. In it are three or four things so false and scandalous that I think I know the authors, and they are of a rank to merit detection. . . . The book is writ by Burnet and a person who has great obligations to me, and the cut is done by Duckett."

Pope would hardly have mentioned Sir Thos. Burnet and failed to do the same by Dennis, had he believed the old critic guilty of

[95] These letters were afterwards inserted in the *Compleat Collection of all the Verses, Essays, Letters, and Advertisements, which have been occasion'd by the Publication of the Three Volumes of Miscellanies by Pope and Company.* This collection has sometimes been attributed to Dennis, but there exists practically no evidence for determining who was its compiler.

[96] *Works,* VIII, 254.

participating in the authorship. Furthermore, Dennis's own testimony in his *Remarks upon the Dunciad* weighs heavily against his participation, for it is here that he declares that he never wrote anything in conjunction with another author. Moreover, he expressly commends, on the last page of his tract, "the ingenious and sagacious Author of Pope Alexander's Supremacy."

The second edition of the *Dunciad* appeared in November, 1729, enlarged by the prefatory *Prolegomena of Martin Scriblerus* and the *Testimonies of Authors,* in which, along with Pope's other enemies, Dennis came in for a full share of ridicule and abuse. Here Pope reviewed ironically many of the critic's utterances against him of the past fifteen years and showed by his quotation of the "young squab" that this epithet, applied eighteen years before in the *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism* still rankled in him. To this new edition Dennis hastened to reply with his *Remarks upon Several Passages in the Preliminaries to the Dunciad, both in the Quarto and in the duodecimo edition, and upon Several Passages in Pope's Preface to his Translation of Homer's Iliad. In both of which is shewn the Author's want of Judgment. With Original Letters from Sir Richard Steele, from the late Mr. Gildon, from Mr. Jacob, from Mr. Pope himself, which shew the Falsehood of the Latter, His Envy and his Malice. By Mr. Dennis,* London, 1729. This long title gives a very fair idea of the nature of the pamphlet, which, in the changing relations of authors, was addressed to Pope's "Monarch of the Dunces," Theobald. To us the chief interest in these *Remarks* lies in their recital of Dennis's relations with Pope, in the transcript of Steele's letter expressing Addison's regret at the publication of the *Narrative of Doctor R. Norris,* and in Pope's conciliatory note to the critic. The discussion of the Dunciad itself is neither long nor important.

Pope continued the conflict, for the most part either unaided or with slight assistance. In his essay *On the Poet Laureate,*[97] dated November 19, 1729, he gravely proposed Dennis as a

[97] Pope's authorship of this essay has been questioned, but it is in all probability his.

candidate for that honor and suggested the brassica as most fitting for the crown. The humor is decidedly grim, for Eusden, who then held the position, did not die till the following September. Returning to this subject in the *Grub Street Journal* on the nineteenth of November, 1730, Pope pretended to show the absurdity of Dennis's candidacy for the laureateship, and from time to time during the period he was using this paper for warring on the enemies of letters, he there published other little flings at the old critic.[98]

As the conflict wore along, there appeared various miscellanies of the tracts involved, such as the *Compleat Collection* mentioned above. E. Curll, the bookseller, printed a *Popiad, extracted from J. Dennis, Sir Richard Blackmore, &;* and Savage issued in 1732 a *Collection of Pieces in Verse and Prose which have been published on Occasion of the Dunciad.* The last pamphlet of any length in the quarrel, so far as Dennis is concerned, was the anonymous *Legal Conviction of Mr. Alexander Pope, &c,*[99] which appeared in 1733, the year before

[98] The following may serve as illustrations: "Whereas upon occasion of certain Pieces relating to the gentlemen of the Dunciad, some of them have been willing to suggest, as if they look'd upon them as an *abuse:* we can no less than own, it is our own opinion, that to call these gentlemen *bad authors,* is no sort of *abuse,* but a great *truth.* We cannot alter our opinion without some reason; but we promise to do it with respect to every person who thinks it an injury to be represented as no Wit or Poet, provided he secure a Certificate of his being really such, from any *three of his companions* in the Dunciad, or from *Mr. Dennis singly,* who is esteemed equal to any three of the number." Quoted in Ward's *Poetical Works of Alexander Pope,* 1897, p. 360.

In this Journal Pope also published the "foul epigram" against Dennis, wrongly attributed to Savage by Dr. Johnson in his life of that author:

> "Should Dennis print how once you robbed your brother,
> Traduced your Monarch; or debauched your mother;
> Say, what revenge on Dennis can be had,
> Too dull for laughter, for reply too mad?
> On one so poor you cannot take the law,
> On one so old your sword you cannot draw,
> Uncag'd then, let the harmless monster rage,
> Secure in dullness, madness, want, and rage."

For a discussion of the authorship of these lines see *Notes and Queries,* 1st Series, IX, 223, and 7th Series, I, 385, 473.

[99] The *Mirror, or Letters Satyrical, Panegyrical, On the Present Times,*

our author's death. The writer of this tract hales Pope before a somewhat prejudiced set of judges, consisting of Dennis, Theobald, and Hill, who sentence him to be banished from Mount Parnassus.

As Dennis came to distress, poverty, and nearly total blindness, Pope professed to take compassion on him and wrote to Aaron Hill,[100] "I do faithfully assure you that I was never angry at any criticism made on my poetry by whomsoever. If I could do Mr. Dennis any humane office, I would, though I am sure he would abuse me tomorrow." Hill evidently regarded the second of Pope's statements as no truer than the first, for two days later he replied sarcastically that Pope might well show his morals as superior as he represented them by securing Dennis a great subscription.[101] Pope answered that he had solicited aid for the old critic from Lord Wilmington, Lord Lansdowne, and others,[102] and added that Dennis had afterwards abused him in print, representing that his subscription had proceeded from fear of further exposure. Hill expressed his regret[103] that Pope's good office should have brought such an affront; and the matter was dropped till November, 1732, when Pope sent[104] Hill a short note concerning the play proposed for Dennis's benefit. For this play Pope wrote a prologue and was generally praised for his benevolence. We shall return to the discussion of this performance; suffice it to state that this apparent service was tinged with malignity, a damning with cynical praise all too evident to the modern reader. Even after the old writer's death Pope had to take his

shewing, The Great Improvement of Wit . . . To Which is added a Legal Conviction of Mr. Alexander Pope &c. A manuscript note on the title page of the copy in the British Museum ascribes the authorship to Giles Jacob. The volume begins with a letter dated the 10th of Dec., 1729, addressed to Mr. J—n D—s, *On Mr. Pope and his Poetry.* The contents of this letter are negligible.

[100] January 26, 1730/31. First appeared in Hill's *Letters,* 1753. Also given in Pope's *Works,* X, 10.

[101] Pope's *Works,* X, 14.

[102] *Ibid.,* X, 18.

[103] *Ibid.,* X, 21.

[104] *Ibid.,* X, 18.

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little fling in the *Satires* at "surley Dennis"[105] and to declare[106] that he could

> "sleep without a poem in [his] head,
> Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead."

Such is the long and somewhat painful history of the relations of Dennis and Pope, in which it seems to the present writer that neither of the men was entirely blameless, but that the record of the former is, on the whole, much the more creditable. If his retorts were harsh, they were provoked, and they were generally delivered in the open. He never resorted to the subterfuges practiced by his opponent; and if he indulged in coarse personalities, it must be remembered that such attacks were still in fashion, and that Pope had begun such a warfare in which he lay especially liable to attack. That Pope should have patched up a truce and then broken it, is hardly to his credit; while his oft-repeated and palpably false assertions of his indifference to Dennis's attacks provoke an occasional smile.

Before leaving this account of Dennis's quarrels with his famous contemporaries, or rather members of the next generation, we may note that he seldom, if ever, began the conflict, and that as a rule he was quick to respond to any friendly advances from his opponent. Once engaged, however, he fought bitterly; he fought aggressively; and he was prone to seize the weapon closest at hand. One must at least admire his courage, an old man—he was seventy-two when he wrote his *Remarks upon the Dunciad*—almost blind, suffering a great deal of physical pain, and oppressed by poverty. Still he was always ready and defiant, and quick to recognize the weak joints in his enemy's armor and to pierce them.

During the years of his bitterest literary quarrels Dennis had been forced to rely upon his pen for his livelihood, and with his advancing years and failing sight had been obliged to husband his efforts. It was but natural, therefore, that he should begin to collect his poems, plays and criticisms with a view to republication. Many of these writings were scattered

[105] *First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace*, ll. 386–387.
[106] *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, ll. 269–270.

among the various booksellers and were incorrectly printed; and Dennis feared that, lacking the support of a cabal, they might be lost. In October, 1717,[107] therefore, he desired John Darby, the bookseller, to collect these publications for him and about three months later he issued a prospectus entitled, *Proposals for Printing by Subscription the Select Works of Mr. John Dennis, In Two Volumes, Octavo.*[108] These books were to be delivered "on the first of May [1718] at the farthest;" and subscriptions were to be taken by John Darby in Bartholomew Close, and at St. James's, the Old Man's, Button's, the Grecian, and Garaway's Coffee Houses. On the last page of the prospectus appeared the following notice:

"*Whereas,* Proposals were given out some time since, for Writing and Printing *A Large Criticism upon our most celebrated English poets deceas'd,* and some Money was receiv'd in that Subscription; and whereas Mr. Dennis was utterly incapacitated for prosecuting this Work, by a Disappointment which neither he nor his Friends could foresee; He hereby gives notice, that what Money was paid on that Account, shall be allow'd in this, if the Gentlemen think fit to subscribe; but if not, it shall be paid back to them, on their Order, by *John Darby* in *Bartholomew-Close.*"

It seems impossible to determine whether this notice refers to the subscriptions which Dennis had obtained in 1703 for his proposed *magnum opus,* or to some attempt to revive that

[107] Lowndes's *Bibliographers' Manual* makes reference to a collection of Dennis's *Works, 1702,* as in the library of Isaac Reed, the Shakspere collector (1742–1807), and this edition is also mentioned in Morley and Tyler's *History of English Literature* and elsewhere. The present writer has been unable to find any allusion to such a collection either in Dennis or in any of his contemporaries, nor is such a book mentioned in the catalogues of any of the libraries to which he has had access.

[108] "Vol. I. To contain the following Poems viz., The Battle of Aghrin, The Sea Fight at LaHogue, The Death of Queen Mary, the Death of King William, The Battle of Blenheim, The Battle of Ramillies, The Accession of King George to the Crown, and The Passion of Byblis. . . . Also the following TRACTS, viz., Priestcraft dangerous to Religion and Government, A Proposal for putting a Speedy End to the War, An Essay on the Italian Operas, An Essay on Publick Spirit, Priestcraft distinguish'd from Christianity.

"Vol. II. Familiar Letters which pass'd betwix Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherley, Mr. Moyle, Mr. Congreve, and the Author. The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry. And Four Plays, viz., Plot and No Plot, Iphigenia, Liberty Asserted, Appius and Virginia."

project. In favor of the former view it may be urged that at the time of issuing his *Proposal* in 1703 Dennis was especially hard pressed for funds, and also that the ambiguous "some time since" of the notice just quoted rather favors the belief that, like many another poor author of his time, Dennis was not prompt in returning subscriptions for work never completed. Possibly it was doubtful for a time whether the *Works* themselves would ever be issued, for while the *Prospectus* promised them by the first of May [1718], either Dennis or the printer was slow in completing his task, so the *Works* were not advertised till late in January 1718–19.[108a] What success attended this venture is not known; but judging from the scarcity of the *Works* today, we may conclude that it probably was not very great.

The *Original Letters,* 1721, which have been discussed, also contain a great deal of reprinted matter, including the *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier* and the *Essay On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear.* This same year appeared another proposal by Dennis, that of printing by subscription in two volumes octavo the following *Miscellaneous Tracts:* the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry, Rinaldo and Armida, a Tragedy, etc.* In this *Proposal* Dennis included three letters of *Observations on the Paradise Lost of Milton* and one to Congreve entitled a *Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer.* The letters on *Paradise Lost* are devoted almost exclusively to a consideration of Addison's critiques of that poem and show in an interesting manner how, in reading the epic, the old critic found it "next to impossible to resist the violent Emotions which the Greatness of the Subject roused" in him. In all probability this new proposal met with but scant encouragement, for it was not till 1727[109] that there appeared a volume of *Miscellaneous Tracts,* which contains, besides the tragedy just mentioned, the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* and the

[108a] The *Daily Courant* states that the *Select Works* were published on February 2, 1718–19.

[109] In the *Plain Dealer* for September 25, 1724, appeared a letter by one of Dennis's friends, urging the Town to subscribe for the *Miscellaneous Tracts.*

Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind. Dennis and the printers miscalculated the number of pages necessary, and the subscribers were few[110] and slow to pay, so that it is little wonder that though the author had the second volume ready for the press, he never undertook to print it, especially as the publication was entirely at his own expense. In 1732 an attempt was made in the way of charity to reprint some of his works, but the project failed for want of subscribers.

In his last years Dennis returned to the task of translation and at the request of Thos. Burnet's[110a] literary executor, F. Wilkinson of Lincoln's Inn, turned into English the *De Fide et Officiis Christianorum.*[111] He dedicated this translation, which was probably published about 1728, to Queen Caroline, on the ground that Burnet had inscribed many of his writings to members of the royal family, and that he would have been pleased to lay this work at the feet of her Gracious Majesty. It is interesting to compare Dennis's preface with that of his *Passion of Byblis,* published forty years before, and to note that he had not changed his ideas on the function of the translator.

[110] Among the names of the hundred and twenty subscribers which appear at the beginning of the volume may be noted those of Barton Booth, Congreve, Gildon, Hill, Mallet, Pope, Savage, and Thomson.

[110a] His dates are 1635?–1715. Those of Sir Thos. Burnet, p. 96, are 1632?–1715?. See the *D. N. B.*

[111] The *Faith and Duties of Christians. A Treatise in Eight Chapters Written originally in Latin by the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Burnet, Master of the Charterhouse. Translated into English by Mr. Dennis,* London, n. d. Burnet's *De Statu* and his *De Fide* were surreptitiously published in 1726 and 1727 respectively. Wilkinson then printed these books authoritatively, the *De Fide* in June, 1727, and the *De Statu* during the following October. He also secured Dennis to translate these works. The critic's advanced age, ill health, and almost total blindness were probably responsible for the interval of five years which elapsed between the publication of the former and the latter of these translations. It is to be noted, however, that *Read's Journal* for January 29, 1727, states that Mr. Dennis the celebrated critic was going into holy orders, and that he had translated Burnet's *De Statu Mortuorum.* The first of these statements is, obviously, simply another of the many genial hits at the critic, while the second indicates that the delay in publishing this translation may not have been entirely Dennis's fault.

Another translation from Burnet, that of *De Statu mortuorum et resurgentium,*[112] 1733, practically closes Dennis's long and varied literary career. The task must have been a trial for the old man of seventy-six years, "deprived of sight unless the object is near," and working under the bitter constraint of want. Yet even these hardships failed to soften his old, fiery independence, for he stated in the preface that he had been urged to complete this task, which he had begun many years before, by the knowledge that the tract had been unworthily translated by another. It would be unjust to expect Dennis to produce any remarkable work under the conditions with which he was then struggling, but this translation shows the old critic anything but the drivelling idiot he has sometimes been represented as being.[113]

These last years were a time of great need; for though, at Lord Halifax's insistence, Dennis had reserved the income from his waitership for a time seemingly ample for his probable life, he survived this reversion and was consequently reduced to a distressing poverty. Early in January, 1725, John Rich, then patentee of the Lincoln's-Inn-Fields theater, voluntarily offered to produce "for the Benefit of so Learned a Benefactor of the Stage, as Mr. Dennis" any play that the critic might select.[114] For this occasion Dennis chose not his own beloved *Liberty Asserted,* but the "*Old Batchelor,* the Work of his Old Friend Mr. Congreve." In 1730 appeared in the newspapers advertisements of a subscription for his benefit. According to Mr. Thomas Cook[115] the Earl of Pembroke sent Dennis presents for the last nine or ten years of his life, at one time thirty guineas, and several times a year five or ten guineas; and Walpole in consideration of the critic's age and infirmities, allowed him 20 l. a year for several years. Dennis's old friend Bishop Atterbury, then in exile in France,

[112] A *Treatise Concerning the State of Departed Souls. Before and At, and After the Resurrection. Written originally in Latin by the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Burnet, Master of the Charter House, Author of the Theory of the Earth. Translated into English by Mr. Dennis.*

[113] Wilson's *Memoirs of . . . Congreve,* II, 136.

[114] The *Plain Dealer,* January 1, 1724/5.

[115] *Gentleman's Magazine,* XLV, Pt. I, 105–106.

was another of his benefactors, sending him at the time the subscription was announced £ 100, though he was obliged to borrow the money for the purpose.[116] But these chance benefactions, which were apparently almost the sole source of Dennis's income, afforded him a very precarious livelihood. Mr. Cook goes on to declare, in the letter just cited, that at this time Dennis "got a good deal by his writings;" but this statement is so evidently untrue as to require no discussion.

After the failure of the proposal to aid Dennis by republishing some of his works, another and more practical plan was suggested and carried out, yielding him about £ 100. Through the interest of Thomson,[117] Martyn, Mallet, and Pope, the

[116] Atterbury's *Correspondence*, 1783, I, 262.

[117] Dennis's friendship for Thomson is reflected in a poem which Mr. Roberts has quoted in the 4th volume of the *Bookworm* as a specimen of our authors better verse:

"JOHN DENNIS TO MR. THOMSON.

"When I reflect thee o'er, methinks I find
Thy various Seasons in their author's mind!
Spring, in thy flow'ry fancy spreads her hues;
And, like thy soft compassion, sheds her dews.
Summer's hot strength in thy expression glows;
And o'er thy page a heavy ripeness throws.
Autumn's rich fruits th' instructed reader gains,
Who tastes the meaning purpose of thy strains.
Winter—but it no semblance bears to thee!
That hoary season's type was drawn from *Me*—
Shatter'd by Time's bleak storms I with'ring lay,
Leafless and whit'ning in a cold decay.
Yet shall my propless Ivy—pale and bent,
Bless the short sunshine which thy pity lent."

It may be doubted whether Dennis really wrote these verses. He was seventy six at the time of their publication and had practically written no verse for twenty years. Then, too, they are different from Dennis's usual tone—he was not much given to pitying himself. Moreover, our suspicions regarding his authorship are strengthened by the fact that in the same number of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in which the above first appeared, there was also a short poem by Savage, *To Mr. Thomson, Author of the Poem of the Four Seasons, on occasion of the Part which that Gentleman took, in the concern of Mr. Dennis's late Benefit.* It is reported that when Dennis heard these latter lines, which appeared anonymously, he declared that they must have been written by "that fool Savage."

Provoked Husband was acted for his benefit, December 8, 1733, by the little company in the Haymarket. Pope was especially active in behalf of his old enemy[118] and wrote for the performance a prologue, which was spoken by Theophilus Cibber. This prologue is a clever piece of work, apparently friendly, but with a covert sneer in almost every line, a performance which gained the writer the passing title of "the charitable Cynic." Four lines may be quoted as typical of the spirit of the whole:

> "How changed from him who made the boxes groan
> And shook the stage with thunder all his own!
> Stood up to dash each vain Pretender's hope,
> Maul the French tyrant, or pull down the Pope."

Dennis survived his benefit but a short time, dying January 6, 1734. He was buried at the parish church of St. Martin's in the Fields.

The next number of the *Gentleman's Magazine,* January, 1734 (p. 47), described him as "the last classick Wit of King Charles's Reign;" and Aaron Hill composed some *Verses written on the Death of Mr. Dennis,* which were published the same year in a short and hastily written *Life.*[119] This anonymous biography of about sixty pages of large type is, on the whole, very sympathetic and gives a good deal of curious information about Dennis. Later there appeared in Cibber's *Lives of the Poets* an interesting though biased account of the critic. The article by Kippis for the second edition of the *Biographia Britannica,* probably written between 1780–1785, is incomplete and inaccurate. Excepting such incidental work as that by Genest in his *Account of the English Stage,* nothing was done in the way of a life of Dennis till Mr. William Roberts published his interesting articles in the *Bookworm* in 1891 and wrote the article for the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

[118] In his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* Pope took occasion to pride himself on his charity:

> "This dreadful satirist Dennis will confess,
> Foe to his pride, but friend to his distress."—*Works,* III, 269.

[119] The *Life of Mr. John Dennis, The Renown'd Critick. In which are likewise Some Observations on most of the Poets and Criticks, his Contemporaries. Not written by Mr. Curll.* London 1734.

Two comparatively unimportant pieces by Dennis were brought to light in the *Monthly Magazine* for June, 1817, one a *Letter to the Rev. Dr. . . .* the other an essay on the *Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry, and the Degeneracy of the Publick Taste.* In an explanatory note the editor states that the letter and essay had been discovered among the manuscript papers of the late Mr. Richardson, who "had endorsed on the back of the essay, 'Copies lodged by Mr. Dennis for money borrowed.'" Only a part of the essay appeared in this June number of the *Monthly Magazine,* the editor promising to complete the publication in an early issue. For some reason he never kept this promise; and Dennis's manuscript has disappeared. Its loss, however, is not a matter for serious regret, since this essay is simply a pot-boiler, adding little or nothing to what the critic had previously urged and reurged.

But three of Dennis's writings have been republished since his death:[120] his translation of the select letters of Voiture, in 1736; his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear* in Smith's *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare,* 1903; and the *Impartial Critick* in the third volume of Professor Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* 1909. These two recent republications are such as to make us hope for the fulfillment of the desire expressed by Dr. Johnson,[121] and later echoed by Southey,[122] that Dennis's critical writings may be collected.

[120] "At the sale of Mr. Bindley's library (1818) Dennis's various works in twelve volumes produced 1 £. 13 s." Lowndes's *Bibliographers' Manual of English Literature,* 1858, II, 628.

[121] Hill's *Johnsonian Miscellanies,* III, 40.

[122] *Specimens of the Later English Poets,* London, 1807, I, 306.

DENNIS AS A CRITIC

I

Outline of His Critical Career

The biography which has just been given reveals a life of prolonged and varied activities. For half a century Dennis labored as a poet, dramatist, letter writer, political pamphleteer, translator, and critic, indefatigably turning from one form of composition to another. As a pamphleteer and translator he has today been practically forgotten; as a poet and dramatist he has fared but little better; and as a critic he has been remembered chiefly as one of the bitter enemies of Pope. It seems probable, indeed, that the larger part of Dennis's work will never interest any but students of early eighteenth century literature, and that most of his numerous writings are doomed to oblivion. In his own day, however, he was regarded as an important member of the republic of letters, being commonly referred to as "the Critic;" and this title has clung to his name for over two centuries. Moreover, within the last quarter of a century one may observe a growing disposition to regard him as "a serious and well equipped" judge of letters, representing many of the critical tendencies of his age, and anticipating some of the verdicts and opinions of later critics. It seems proper, therefore, to consider what were the chief critical tendencies of Dennis's time, what was his attitude toward them, and what has been his influence upon subsequent criticism. In beginning, then, let us characterize briefly and in a somewhat anticipatory fashion the main divisions of his critical writings and note some of the particular influences of his life and times upon him. His career as a critic, it seems, falls naturally into the three periods indicated in the sketch of his life—the first including his work to 1700, the second from the beginning of the eighteenth century to 1710, and the third from 1710 to the time of his death in 1734.

The first of these divisions may be characterized as the formative period, when he was acquiring and reflecting some of the ideas of his masters, such as Le Bossu, St. Évremond, Rymer, and Dryden. Of these masters the one most potent with Dennis was Dryden, whose influence upon our author and the other young men of his coterie evoked Shaftsbury's sneer.[1] This influence of Dryden is particularly noticeable in Dennis's first critical discussion, the *Impartial Critick,* 1693. In this answer to Rymer's proposal to introduce the Greek chorus into the English drama Dennis employed practically the same arguments that Dryden had set down in his "Heads" of an answer to that project. There can be little doubt that Dryden and Dennis discussed together this question of the use of the chorus and other critical problems of the time, and that the former led the latter to a thorough study of the French critics. In the years of his acquaintance with Dennis Dryden had at his command a fairly wide knowledge of contemporary French critics, whom he regarded with a respect that unquestionably influenced his follower. Dennis soon came to be familiar with the criticisms of Rapin and Le Bossu, the half English St. Évremond, Dacier and Boileau, so that his earlier critical writings are in good measure reexpressions of their ideas. For example, his second important venture in criticism, the *Remarks* upon Blackmore's *Prince Arthur,* 1696, is, as will later be shown in detail, simply an application of Le Bossu's theories in judgment of this fashionable epic. Dennis accepted Le Bossu's laws for the plot, character, manners, etc., and then judged Blackmore's poem by these canons. Our author's knowledge of French literature was, however, by no means confined to criticism, for like Dryden he also possessed a very fair acquaintance with the chief French dramatists, if we may judge by the numerous and apt allusions he makes to them, especially to Corneille, Racine, and Molière. With St. Évremond Dennis praised Corneille's tragic above his comic genius; and with that same critic, too, he considered that of all French comedies Molière's best exemplified the true spirit of their type.

[1] *Supra,* p. 7.

His application to the classics was even closer. His acquaintance with Greek, however, though it far surpassed that of either Dryden or Pope, was somewhat inferior to his knowledge of Latin.[2] Nevertheless, on the whole, his classical attainments were so great that he was frequently and seriously referred to as "the learned Mr. Dennis," a title which the enemies of his later years sometimes applied to him with mock respect.

Despite his regard for the classics, however, Dennis did not hesitate to join with the wits of the day in burlesquing them. The fashion for burlesque, which had flourished in France with Scarron and had reached its height in England during the late seventeenth century, was essentially antagonistic to the prevailing exaltation of the classics. Travesties and burlesques of Vergil, Ovid, and other Latin writers were then numerous; and, despite his love for the ancients, Dennis joined in the fashion, publishing as one of his very earliest ventures in letters, 1692, the *Poems in Burlesque*. In his plays, however, Dennis kept fairly close to the neo-classical standards, so that his dramas were praised by Jacob and others as "perfectly regular performances."

Being himself a playwright, Dennis very naturally undertook his third important venture in criticism—the reply to Collier's attack on the stage. The arguments of the greater part of Dennis's book are negligible, for, as he himself recognized, his discussion of the opinions of the church fathers is of

[2] The extent of his reading may be inferred from his *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism* (p. 4) where he states his preference among the classics: "Of all the poets among the Greeks I only admire Homer, Sophocles, Pindar and Euripides, tho' I am very much pleased with some of the rest; and of the poets among the Romans, I admire only Virgil and Horace and some parts of Lucretius; though I am very much pleased with Catullus, Terrence and others. As for Lycophron, Nonnus, Apollonius Rhodius, Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus, Statius, I prefer the Paradise Lost of Milton before them altogether." In his *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers* (p. 28) Dennis states, "The very character of Simo in the Andria is admirable, and the relation he makes to Scotia a masterpiece. I never read it but I see the old Athenian before my eyes in the same colors that Daves paints Critho the Andrian in the same comedy. What he says goes to my heart."

slight worth; and the modern reader is likely to give but little more heed to his consideration of the attitude of antiquity toward the stage. His best argument lay in his contention that Collier was right in attacking the abuses of the play house, but that he was wrong in his onslaught against the stage itself. This reply to Collier was Dennis's last important criticism in the seventeenth century, and it added not a little to his reputation. Indeed, during the closing years of the century, when Rymer and Blackmore flourished, Dennis might well be ranked after Dryden as the nation's most important critic.

Soon after the death of Dryden Dennis produced his principal independent work, the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* which is an amplification and defense of his belief that by infusing religious enthusiasm into their poetry, the moderns might come to equal the ancients. Three years later, 1704, appeared the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* which carried this novel doctrine as far as Dennis apparently was able to advance it. In the *Grounds* he appeared entangled with the conventional critical ideas of his time and seemingly helpless to offer much practical advice for perfecting this union of religion and poetry. His theory, however, gained some support, partly because it seemed substantiated by the writings of Milton, whom our author praised so highly, and partly because it was enunciated by Dennis; for in the first decade of the eighteenth century, brief as that period may be, he was generally recognized as England's foremost critic, and even in his later years he was frequently assigned this position.

While Dennis's reputation with his contemporaries was founded largely upon the two works just mentioned, the present age may well place an equal or a greater value upon another of his writings of the same period, his *Large Account of the Taste in Poetry,* 1702. This tract, with its keen consideration of the influence of political and social conditions upon the production of letters and its clear-sighted comparison of the taste of his own age with that of the Restoration, deserves most of the praise bestowed upon it by Mr. Swinburne.[3]

[3] *St. James's Gazette,* November 8, 1895.

Two other criticisms of slight importance—a second reply to Collier and an attack upon the Italian operas—appeared in this same decade; but his numerous labors of the first five years of the century seem to have exhausted the critic, so that the second half of the decade was comparatively unproductive. In 1711 appeared his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear,* in which Dennis maintained, after Dryden, that the Elizabethan was "one of the greatest Geniuses the world had ever seen for the Tragick stage," and that his beauties were all his own and his faults those of his environment.

About the time of the publication of this *Essay* came a change in Dennis's fortunes as a critic. His preeminence as a judge of letters through the first ten years of the century was due in part at least to the lack of any serious competitor; but with the passing years came changing critical theory and literary practice, and the age of Dryden gave way to the age of Pope. Dennis's convictions and prejudices then began to grate more and more against the current critical tendencies, and the innate dogmatism of this censor of letters was intensified by a new and formidable opposition. Against a possible broadening of his views weighed his increasing years and his dimming eyesight. It is thoroughly significant that Dennis should have been greatly influenced by Rapin and Le Bossu and but little by La Bruyère, whom Addison and the other younger critics valued so highly. Nor were his views in his later years likely to be broadened by his close association with Gildon, whose *Complete Art of Poetry,* 1718, stands as one of the last defenses of the mechanical rules. In the beginning of his Introduction to that book Gildon refers to his daily intercourse with Dennis, and in the Preface he gives a hint as to their common critical interests:

> "Whatever I have found to my design in Aristotle (chiefly); in Horace; in Dyonysius of Halicarnassus, Boileau, Rapin, Dacier, Gerard Vossius's Poetical Institutions, the late Duke of Buckinghamshire's most excellent Essay on Poetry, Mr. Dennis or any other, I have made bold with."

This list, which is significant no less for what it omits than for what it includes, probably represents the basis of Gildon's critical discussions with Dennis over their modest libations.

Two strongly marked characteristics of Dennis's criticism during these later years of his life may be noted—one the growing mistrust of any literary innovations and the other an increasing veneration for the rules. Both were largely the result of his surroundings. It is easy to see in the light of his biography why this self-opinionated and proud old man should have clung to the past and should have felt that the national taste was degenerating. Furthermore, in his attacks upon the works of another generation he was forced more and more to defend the critical tenets the age was outgrowing. In fact the writings of his later years advance few critical beliefs which have contributed to his reputation. Of these few criticisms which are to be noted as exceptions, the chief are his *Remarks upon Cato* and those *upon Pope's Translation of Homer.* In the former Dennis opposed a strict adherence to the unities of time and place and argued effectively against any servile observance of them. In his attack upon Pope's version of Homer he indicated with considerable acumen the weaknesses of that translation both in spirit and in style; while his censures on Pope's heroic couplets anticipate nearly everything noticed by subsequent criticism. But even this better work is marred by his growing pedanticism. He added to his criticism of *Cato* an almost valueless discussion of the sentiments of the play and overweighted his vital censures of Pope's translation with a burden of petty cavils. This same tone prevails throughout his comments on the *Rape of the Lock* and on the *Dunciad* and throughout his criticisms of Steele. In his judgment of these writers his growing insistence upon the value of conformity to the laws of the type is especially marked; and he sometimes went to the point of denying the name of literature to such writings as did not conform to these standards. Indeed he shows so little of his old penetration in these later diatribes that on the whole his reputation would have gained rather than lost, had he published nothing during his last fifteen years. In the years just preceding his death, when Pope had cast opprobrium upon verbal criticism, some of the contemporary writers, such as Fielding in his *Tragedy of Tragedies,* helped fix on Dennis the reputation of a literal-

minded, caviling critic, given him by Pope and the other enemies of his old age; and this reputation has clung to him even till today. Viewed in its entirety, Dennis's critical career may be summarized as beginning with the commonly accepted beliefs of his time, then working toward freer conceptions, some of which anticipated doctrines that have been assigned to later critics, and finally hardening into conservatism and emphasizing the more conventional beliefs of his earlier years.

II

The Principal Critical Tendencies of the Age

A. *Neoclassicism*

To understand the beliefs common at the time Dennis began his critical career, we may well inquire what were the chief critical tendencies of the period, what in brief was their history, and what their relations with each other. Though we may question the exactness and completeness of any analysis of these critical tendencies of the time (for seventeenth century criticism is, as Professor Spingarn has well put it, "a very troubled stream"), still we may find it helpful at least to indicate some of the main currents of the period and to suggest their principal characteristics and their chief interrelations. Five such tendencies in English criticism near the close of the seventeenth century may be noted,—the neo-classical, the rationalistic, the patriotic, the moralistic, and that of the school of taste. Each of these movements had at its center some well marked idea which gave it character; although in their practical workings in the writings of the age, these various tendencies sometimes reenforced, sometimes opposed one another. Of course while operative in the seventeenth century, they were not always analyzed and discriminated as they have been by later critics who have enjoyed the perspective afforded by the passing of time. Occasionally the writers of those days recognized the clash of these forces and attempted to find grounds for a reconcilement; sometimes they were satisfied simply to phrase the conflict or contrast; sometimes they did not perceive that certain of these tendencies were potent in their work. Of

these several tendencies one of the most prominent was the neo-classical, and with it we may well begin the consideration of these different literary currents.

The Italians of the later Renaissance had evolved a body of formal criticism based on the ancients, which had been received by the French and developed still further in the sixteenth and more especially in the seventeenth centuries. It was to DuBellay, says Professor Spingarn,[1] "that France owes the introduction of classical ideas into French literature;" but it was Chapelain who introduced the formal rules of the Italians.[2] These critical ideas were carried on through Corneille and Rapin, till under Boileau, they became not rules but "laws inevitable and infallible."[3] It was from the Italians, however, rather than from the French that these rules were received by Sidney and his age, whose work practically marks the beginning of English literary criticism; though it was customary for Englishmen in the latter part of the seventeenth century to ignore the other earlier critics and to declare with Rymer[4] that Ben Jonson had had all the critical learning to himself. With the progress of the seventeenth century, however, closer relations had arisen between England and France, not only politically but also intellectually, so that the writings of the French critics gained on the island increased attention and respect. Finally with Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* the arguments of French criticism were fully introduced into English.[5]

The principal characteristics of this neo-classicism may be briefly summarized, for practically all of them sprang from an attempt to discover how modern writers might comprehend

[1] *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, with Special Reference to the Influence of Italy in the Formation and Development of Modern Classicism,* New York, 1899, p. 215.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 243.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 248.

[4] Preface to his translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle,* 1674. In the *Discourse concerning Satire* Dryden speaks of "Ben's close monopoly of the rules." Ker, *Essays of John Dryden,* Oxford, 1900, II, 17.

[5] Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* Oxford, 1908, I, lxiii.

and make their own the greatness of the classics.[6] The rules evolved by the neo-classicists were based in part upon the practice of a few writers, such as Vergil and Homer, but more especially upon the precepts of Aristotle and Horace, whose every utterance was examined and elaborated with a minute and not always consistent pedanticism by such critics as Rapin, Le Bossu, and Dacier,[7] into a system that was considered

[6] Dacier in his *Oeuvres d'Horace* (Amsterdam, 1735), p. 70, states "Car il est faux qu'il y ait deux bons gouts, il n'y en a qu'un, et c'est celui de l'antique."

[7] Rapin, Le Bossu, and Dacier did much to establish Aristotle's authority in England. Many of Dryden's views regarding the rules were derived from these French critics, and to him and them Dennis was largely indebted for his ideas on the subject of regularity. Throughout his entire career he quoted Rapin frequently and almost always with respect, if not with agreement. In the *Complete Art of Poetry*, 1718, Gildon referred to the French critic as our author's "old acquaintance."

Le Bossu, with his treatise on the epic, did much to popularize the rules both in France and in England. Dryden in his last years valued this writer highly and called him the best of the modern critics (Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*, II, 314); while Buckingham paid him the highest of tributes as disclosing the secrets of the epic (*Essay on Poetry*, ll. 289 ff.). Dennis practically repeated the sentiments there expressed when he declared that no modern had understood the epic till Le Bossu had unravelled it (*Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 201). We have already noticed that our author adopted Le Bossu's scheme in judging Blackmore's *Prince Arthur*.

Dacier is the French critic of the times who stands as perhaps the most thoroughgoing neo-classicist. His comments on Aristotle and on Horace did much to load the rules on English critics, including Dryden and Dennis. The former quoted him with respect in the prefaces to his translations of Vergil and of Juvenal, while the latter frequently cited his authority and praised his "excellent comment on Aristotle's Art of Poetry" (*Stage Defended*, p. 9). Dennis did not hesitate, however, to attack some of Dacier's ideas, such as the plea for the restoration of the chorus; but his general attitude toward this extreme representative of neo-classicism is one of marked respect.

Probably the most important influence for regularity exerted upon the English dramatists was that of Corneille, whose critical utterances show a long struggle between his regard for regularity and his love of freedom (Ker, *Dryden's Essays*, I, xix ff.). It was this struggle that, in part at least, attracted Dryden, who introduced into England many of Corneille's opinions and rules. By Dennis (the *Theatre*, II, 380) and his generation it was commonly asserted that Corneille had introduced into France the

permanently adequate for judging letters. Literature was regarded as static rather than dynamic: the practice of the ancients had brought letters to a perfection beyond which advancement was, for the later neo-classicists at least, practically impossible, so that the best for which they might hope was to discover and reproduce something of the charm of antiquity. It was but natural that such a conception of letters should emphasize regularity and order and should attempt to reduce literary theory and practice to simplicity and unity. Neo-classicism concerned itself almost exclusively with poetry to the neglect of prose, and, for the most part, it further narrowed its field to the discussion of two types of poetry—the drama and the epic. Such a limitation was due in large measure to the fact that these two forms had received particular attention from the master critics Aristotle and Horace. Furthermore, partly through the influence of these critics, partly through the influence of the growing rationalism,[8] soon to be discussed, but more especially because of its adaptability to the neo-classical scheme, the plot or fable received especial emphasis.[9] Again, these neo-classicists, following Aristotle's insistence upon each type's yielding a pleasure proper to its kind, placed an exaggerated stress upon conformity to the rules of the special species. With these conceptions went those of a sustained dignity of language and of subject matter, the former pruning away verbal extravagancies, and the latter quickening the distaste for the commonplace subjects of lowly life and fostering in writers an almost exclusive attention to court affairs. The conception of literature and attitude toward it just outlined had become prevalent in France about the middle of the seventeenth century, and from that country it passed to England.

rules of dramatic composition, especially those of the unities, and that through his influence they had prevailed with the English playwrights (Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage,* 1698, p. 229; Filmer's *Further Defense of Dramatic Poetry,* 1698, p. 29; cf. St. Évremond's *Works,* 1719, II, 12). With both Corneille's doctrines and his plays Dennis was thoroughly acquainted.

[8] Cf. Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy,* 1693, p. 4; p. 19.

[9] "The fable is so essential to poesy that there is no poesy without it." Rymer's translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle,* 1674, p. 31. Cf. Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, xviii.

Its progress was assisted by the Restoration, which gave to England a court steeped in French ideas. It is far from surprising, therefore, that the English critics of that day should have numbered among them many of the nobility, such as Roscommon, Mulgrave, and Lansdowne.

B. *Rationalism*

"The French neo-classicists made literature rational and intelligible by working it out according to an *a priori* scheme attributed to the ancients. The English rationalists, thoroughgoing sensationalists in philosophy, achieved practically the same result by bringing art down to the actualities of life."[10] So far as literature was concerned, rationalism was essentially a system that would measure poetry by the yard stick of prose.[11] English rationalism is commonly held to owe its beginnings largely to the philosophy of Hobbes,[12] who considered the poetic imagination a work of the understanding. The earlier rationalists maintained that sense was sufficient for judging letters, an attitude quite antagonistic to the neo-classical respect for the rules. Rymer once declared that a knowledge of the classics is unnecessary for the critic[13]—"Common sense suffices;" and he added, "rarely have I known Women-judges mistaken on these points, when they have had the patience to think." Dryden, too, in his varying allegiance, sometimes took this rationalistic position. Thus in discussing Ovid's treatment of the passions,[14] he declared that to prove a certain point he should "need no other judges than the generality of [his] readers; for all passions being inborn with us, we are almost equally judges when we are concerned in the representation of them." For the unchanging standards which the neo-classicists found in the ancients, the rationalists

[10] Bohn, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXII, 116.

[11] Hamelius, *Die Kritik in der Englischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1897, p. 45.

[12] Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, lxix.

[13] *Ibid.*, I, lxx. Here is given an admirable account of this movement.

[14] *Works*, I, 233. Quoted by Bohn in *Pub. Mod. Lan. Assoc. Amer.*, XXII, 116.

substituted that of sense. Naturally they disapproved of extravagance of every sort, frowned upon the creative imagination, and looked with disfavor upon any free play of the fancy. The school of common sense demanded probability and decorum;[15] it cast its influence against the fantastic figures of speech current in the earlier years of the century and did much toward trimming away luxuriance of style. Its influence affected not only the form but also the content of letters; for it regarded man as a reasonable being, especially in the social relation, and permeated the life of the time with the conviction that conduct should be sensible, and that literature should represent life as sweetly reasonable. For Rymer the mechanical universe, the rationalistic order of things of the philosophy of Hobbes and Locke was to mark the bounds of literature: "the laws of poetry must approximate as closely as possible to the laws of life."[16] Such demands are exemplified in the contention for poetic justice and even more forcibly by some of Rymer's rules for the proprieties of the stage.

The first notable manifestation of this school in England came with the production of the *Rehearsal.* English rationalism affected France and in turn gained something from that country, and in the latter part of the seventeenth century constant reference is made in French criticism to "les bons sens."[17] Rationalism, however, held so much in common with neo-classicism, that in the course of time the two were reconciled by a theory in criticism allowing for both, which found its best expression in Boileau[18] and in Pope. Each of these essentially prosaic systems was really based upon a respect for authority, the one for the classics, the other for good sense. But the classics, it came to be urged, were the best examples of good

[15] "Rules are to be observed for avoiding confusion; good sense is to be followed for moderating the flight of a luxuriant fancy." St. Évremond's *Works,* 1719, II, 83.

[16] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, lxviii.

[17] *Ibid.,* I, lxix ff.: "Moliere, in the *Critique de l'École des Femmes* (1663), first adopted reason as a standard sufficient in itself for the critical discussion of literature."

[18] While recognizing Horace as Boileau's master, Dennis valued the latter as the exponent of reason as the basis of the rules. E. g., *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock,* pp. 8, 44.

sense, and in them reason found a supreme manifestation. Here was "nature methodized" and at its best.

C. *The Moralistic Tendency*

Another movement of the times, the moralistic, shows some points of agreement and some of disagreement with neo-classicism and rationalism. We have already noticed how good sense had set its seal of approval on the moral thing as the reasonable one; and in so far as the moralistic movement was mental rather than emotional, it worked in practical accord with rationalism. But in matters going beyond pure reason, the two clashed in a way remarkably emphasized in Dennis's critical ideas. The relation of this movement with neo-classicism was, at least superficially, more noticeable than its relation with rationalism. It is true that one of the great neo-classical authorities, Aristotle, had declared for pleasure rather than for profit as the chief end of poetry; but he had none the less asserted that the "divine art" is a more effective school of virtue than is history.[19] Moreover, Horace had advocated what has been called[20] the ethical conception of the beginnings of poetry, which regarded the poet as "originally a law giver or divine prophet." It is not surprising, therefore, that the neo-classicists insisted strongly upon morality as an important factor in literature. So strongly indeed did the moralistic tendencies of the time react upon the adherents of the rules that they came to accept the doctrine that a moral idea lies at the basis of the plot of every great masterpiece. Many of the neo-classicists went so far as to assert that only a good man can be a great poet, a belief that found its first complete expression with Strabo[21] and was afterwards frequently echoed

[19] "For if Poetry be more philosophical, and more instructive, than History, as Aristotle is pleas'd to affirm of it, and no Man ever knew the Nature either of Poetry, or of History, or of Philosophy, better than he did; why then that Art, or rather that Artifice, with which a great many Writers of Verses and Plays debauch and corrupt the People, is a thing to which Poetry is directly contrary." *Proposal,* prefatory to the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* 1704.

[20] *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance,* p. 188.

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 24.

in English literature from Jonson[22] to Dryden.[23] Among the different efforts to unite these two forces may be cited that of Blackmore, in the preface to his *Prince Arthur,* 1696, where he had attempted to show how each of the literary types in its own peculiar way conduces to morality.

English criticism has never been free from this moralistic tendency; for Sidney and Puttenham had shown its influence, and Bacon had held that through poetry man might partly regain the happiness he lost at the fall.[24] Though Waller had said frankly that pleasure is the end of poetry,[25] he had, none the less, loved the prophets as the masters of the poets. Cowley and Davenant had emphasized the relation of religion and poetry; and Hamelius's statement[26] that we can name by the dozen the religious poets of the century is scarcely an exaggeration. In this connection one instinctively recalls the high ideals of the poet's consecrated office held by Milton, whose practice and critical beliefs influenced powerfully the course of Dennis's thought. Moreover, the moralistic movement in England was strengthened by a similar current in France. The Christian epic became immensely popular on the continent; the moral tone of letters was raised; Rapin and Bouhours, to cite examples at random, were in the church; and Le Bossu was a religious recluse. Before the discussion was taken up in England, Desmaretes and others had urged that the Christian religion should be made the basis of poetry, especially of the drama. With the reaction of the strong English conscience against the excesses of the Restoration came an inevitable protest against the licentiousness of one of the most court-dominated institutions of the time, the theatre. This protest came from the nation itself and was so strong and vigorous that when Collier wrote against the immorality of the stage, he was attacking a moribund evil.[26a] In the earlier years of the

[22] Dedication to *Volpone.*

[23] Ker, II, 129. Cf. also the preface to *Tyrannic Love, Works,* III, 376.

[24] In the 98th *Tatler* Steele discusses this attitude of Bacon's.

[25] *Muses, Library* ed., p. 225.

[26] *Die Kritik in der Englischen Literatur,* p. 58.

[26a] Collier's attack was partly the result of the continued war waged against public immorality by the Societies for Reformation of Manners,

eighteenth century this moralistic tendency manifested itself in literature in many ways: it stamped the chief critical writings of Dennis; it characterized the consciously ethical dramas of such writers as Rowe and Steele; it dominated the writings of Dissenters like Dr. Watts and Mrs. Rowe; and most important of all perhaps, it permeated the tone of the *Spectator*.[27]

D. *The Patriotic Tendency*

Another influence upon English literature at this time was the patriotic, which emphasized the relation of letters with the national life and politics and magnified the importance of the works of native writers. In so far as this trend furthered the assertion of national characteristics as opposed to the respect for authority, it may be regarded as allied to romanticism. In so far as it emphasized the importance of environment in the production of letters, it is allied with the tendency represented by the school of taste. Indeed it might be treated as one of the characteristics of that school soon to be considered, but its importance in connection with Dennis's critical beliefs entitles it to a separate discussion. The Renaissance had aroused in the people of western Europe a realization of national existence and had quickened their patriotism. In France, however, the influence of the Pléiade had been thrown against the old French traditions and in favor of those of the classics, and this influence was potent in divorcing literature from the national life.

which were active throughout England and Ireland during the reign of William and Mary, and in support of which a large body of literature was issued under the direction of men like the Reverend Doctors Woodward and Bray. These tracts by Woodward and others reached sections of the public which Addison and Steele, for example, could not touch.

[27] In praise of this aspect of the *Spectator* Sir Richard Blackmore said: "It was with great Pleasure and Satisfaction that Men, who wish'd well of their Country and Religion, saw the People delighted with Papers which lately came abroad as daily Entertainment; in which rich Genius and Poetical Talents were employ'd in their proper Province, that is, to recommend Virtue and regular Life, and discourage and discountenance the Follies, Faults, and Vices of the Age; . . . Nor was it without good Effect, for the People in some measure recover'd their true Relish, and discern'd the Benefit and Moral Advantages as well as the Beauties of these daily Pieces, and began to have profane and immodest Writings in Contempt." *Essays*, 1717, II, 268.

Though the example of the French was not without its effect upon England, our native writers of the last half of the seventeenth century were repeatedly emphasizing the dependence of letters upon the political well being of the nation. For example, Milton had reasserted the old classical idea of the relation of government and creative literature,[28] and this idea was repeated in the pages of Dennis and Shaftsbury.[29] In 1668 Dryden had contended for the English as opposed to the French, and for the moderns against the ancients, and had based his arguments partly upon patriotic grounds.[30] Late in life he spoke thus in the preface to the *Fables:*

"as I am, and always have been, studious to promote the honour of my native country, so I am resolved to put their merits to the trial, by turning some of the Canterbury Tales into our language, as it is now refined;"

Roscommon boasted[31] of the greater energy, succinctness, and wit of his own nation; and Temple emphasized[32] the superior genius of the English. The gradual recognition of Milton and the renewed interest in Spenser were, in a measure at least, due to the growing feeling that these writers were an honor to the country; and this same pride unquestionably fostered the growth of the popularity of the ballads, which were repugnant alike to the neo-classicist and to the rationalist.

E. *The School of Taste*

The last of these influences to be considered is that of the school of taste, the principal characteristics of which may be briefly summarized. Perhaps it might better be called a tendency than a school, for its chief exponents were generally allied with other movements.[33] This school (if we call it

[28] Prose Works, ed. St. John, I, 214.

[29] *Works,* 1900, I, 143, 155.

[30] Cf. the preface to *All for Love:* "For my part I desire to be tried by the laws of my own country; for it seems unjust to me that the French should prescribe till they have conquered."

[31] *Essay on Translated Verse,* l. 50.

[32] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, xciv.

[33] For a discussion of the school of taste see Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, lxxxiii ff., on which the present résumé is very largely based.

such) insisted upon viewing literature as progressive and changing and as something to be considered in its relations with the human mind. Again, it came to regard the function of the critic as appreciative rather than depreciative, and also to demand that letters should be judged by the standards of taste, which were quite apart from those of reason.

The term *taste* had come into vogue at about the same time in both France and England. Howard, in the preface to the *Great Favourite,* 1668, declared that "taste is the only thing that can govern the composition of the drama;" and though Dryden then ridiculed the word,[84] he afterwards came to employ it freely and to adopt some of the views of the school.[85] In France Méré and Bouhours, St. Évremond and La Bruyère stand as the chief exponents of taste, though the beliefs of all of these were related with other and different schools.[86]

This school or tendency of taste is exemplified in France in Méré's insistence upon the supremacy of the heart over the mind in the judgment of letters. This contrast of heart and head became a familiar one among the critics of the time; Bouhours, for example, who had attributed to Voiture this distinction between "esprit et coeur," assigned to each an equal place.[87] With Méré he recognized in letters a grace beyond the power of rule and reason. Again, the current respect for the neo-classical rules had accustomed critics to noticing the faults rather than the merits of an author. In their protest against such an attitude toward letters the school of taste was stimulated by the translation and popularization by Boileau in 1674 of Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime,* which emphasized the importance of discovering the beauties rather than the blemishes of a book.[88] The beauty-blemish theory as it has

[84] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, xcvii.

[85] *Ibid.,* I, cii.

[86] "Some of them, like Méré and Bouhours, represent or inherit the traditions of the Précieuses, more or less purified by classical culture and tempered by good sense; others, like Saint-Évremond, renew the spirit of the earlier and freer stages of classicism; still others, like La Bruyère, seem the natural product of the classical spirit itself." *Ibid.,* I, xciv.

[87] *Ibid.,* I, xcvii.

[88] This idea became an especially favorite one with Addison and his friends.

been called, which gained a wide popular acceptance early in the eighteenth century, aided greatly in establishing a finer and more appreciative criticism of letters.

Again, the current interest in science and history assisted in strengthening the school of taste. In England the Baconian traditions helped vitalize and increase the common interest in science and other forms of research, which probably surpassed that of any other country. The virtuosi, such as Sir William Temple, with their manifold and concurrent interests in science, art, antiquarianism, letters, and criticism, also did much to foster the conception that literature is a growth, and that it bears an intimate relation with the conditions under which it is produced. It is not surprising, therefore, that the school of taste, both in France and in England, should have revived the idea of the influence of climate and race upon letters, and that it should have begun to study the relations of the writer, the piece of literature, and the reader.

This tendency or school at first emphasized[39] taste as a mental perception or sentiment quite independent of reason; but after Hobbes and Howard and St. Évremond, the prevailing rationalism of the times encroached upon this conception till with La Bruyère it had come to conform to a standard of its own—the norm of taste, which was recognized as quite distinct from the rules of the neo-classicists.[40] Thus La Bruyère believed:[41]

"There is a point of perfection in art, as of excellence or maturity in nature. He who is sensible of it and loves it has a perfect taste; he who is not sensible of it and loves this or that else on either side of it has a faulty taste. There is then a good and a bad taste, and men dispute about taste not without reason."

Shaftsbury stands as one of the greatest English exponents of this doctrine of taste; and his words may be cited as illustrative of the position of the later members of this school, which was not far from that of the rationalists: "I like! I fancy! I

[39] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, xcvii.

[40] This attempt to allow for a grace beyond the reach of the rules provoked the neo-classicists to such attacks as those of Dacier in his remarks on Horace and on Aristotle.

[41] Quoted in the *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, xcviii.

admire! How? By accident, or as I please? No. But I learn to fancy, to admire, to be pleased, as the subjects themselves are deserving, and can bear me out."[42]

These different tendencies just outlined manifest each with its own peculiar characteristics many traits of which they partake more or less in common; and in their development through the last years of the seventeenth century they show the effects of the attempts to reconcile them. The great crux of the whole matter is the inevitable clash which has come in all ages between authority and individualism. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, criticism was almost completely dominated by authority, with its insistence upon regularity.

The influence of nearly all these different currents is well illustrated in the critical attitude of Dennis's friend and master Dryden.[43] He never fully submitted to the neo-classical rules, nor on the other hand did he ever completely discard them. In the period when he was under the influence of Rymer he could write,[44] "I have endeavored in this play to follow the practice of the Ancients who are . . . and ought to be our Masters." But he could also assert in that same preface that the models of the antique drama "are too little for the English tragedy;" and he elsewhere contended that if Aristotle had been familiar with the modern drama, he would have changed his laws. In his later years Dryden seems to have been markedly influenced by the doctrines of Le Bossu and to have accepted the French critic's contention that the poet must select his moral and upon this build his fable or plot.[45] Indeed it is not too much to say that Dryden's critical views expressed during the last ten years of his life show a greater respect for the rules than do his utterances of any of his earlier decades. But his strong national spirit and critical acumen prevented his yielding any servile submission to French

[42] *Works*, 1900, I, 218.

[43] "In ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit bilden Drydens Vorreden eine förmliche Encyklopädie aller Meinungen seiner Zeit, sodass er in der Geschichte der Kritik . . . oft als sein eigener Gegner erscheinen muss." Hamelius, *Die Kritik*, p. 66.

[44] Preface to *All for Love*.

[45] Ker, I, 213.

authority. While he was translating Vergil and Juvenal for his countrymen, he was also making accessible to them the writings of their own Chaucer. He bestowed generous praise upon Shakspere and early commended Milton. Moreover, he showed himself prompt to defend the English drama against that of the ancients,[46] and he must be classed as fighting for the moderns. At times his attitude is decidedly that of the rationalist, as when he declares[47] that "the rules are founded on good sense and sound reason," rather than on authority, a view which Dennis expressed later in much the same terms.[48] Through the last years of Dryden's life the relations between him and Dennis, as has been shown, were especially intimate. One is impressed, indeed, by the closeness with which Dennis's critical views of this last decade of the seventeenth century reflect practically all the important opinions expressed by Dryden. Each of them has recorded a warm admiration of Le Bossu and his treatment of the epic; each resented the efforts of Racine and Rymer to introduce the chorus into the modern drama; each maintained the superiority of the English poets and dramatists to the French; both were interested in developing the English Pindaric. Again, Dryden's discussion of the possibility of introducing Christian divinities or supernatural agencies into modern poetry probably did much to direct our critic's theorizing regarding the relations of religion and poetry. Furthermore, after 1700 Dennis championed his master's theory and practice against the ideas of Pope and his followers, as is witnessed by his strong letter to Tonson, *On the Conspiracy against the Reputation of Mr. Dryden,*[49] and by his defense of his master's freedom in coining words.[50]

[46] Ker, I, lxvi.

[47] *Ibid.*, I, 228.

[48] *Impartial Critick* in Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, III, 194.

[49] *Original Letters* p. 289 ff.

[50] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 16.

III

On Imitation and Invention

The critical questions with which Dennis and his age were chiefly concerned arose in the main from the clash of the various tendencies just discussed. What is the nature of poetic invention and imitation? From whence should the writer and critic derive their standards,—from authority? from reason? from inspiration? from taste? Are the classical authors greater than the moderns? Should the poet make use of Christian beliefs, or should he cling to the gods of antiquity? Are the rules applicable to all times, or must they be modified to meet changing conditions? What are the characteristics of each type of letters, and how far is the writer bound to observe them? What should be the object of poetry—to please or to instruct? What should be the relation in poetical composition of emotion and reason? How Dennis proceeded to answer these questions, what authorities he accepted in his attempts, how far his answers agreed with those of his contemporaries, how they changed with the years, and what effect they had upon others, these are some of the questions that we must now attempt to answer.

Dennis's conception of art, with which we may well begin, was one not uncommon in his times. The Platonic element introduced into Renaissance criticism[1] had emphasized the conception of the poet as one who brushes aside the hard work-a-day world and shapes in its place a world of beauty. This conception found expression in Sidney and was given a moral turn by Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*.[2] Milton took up the same idea, declaring that "The end of Learning is to repair the Ruin of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright;"[3] and he went on to show how poetry may be made efficacious to that end. Echoing Milton, Dennis states[4] that "the great Design of the Arts is to restore the decays that happened to human Nature by the fall;" and he placed this idea

[1] *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 157.

[2] *Works*, 1863, IV, 204–206.

[3] *Of Education, to Mr. Samuel Hartlib.*

[4] *Works*, II, 418. Steele voices the same idea in the *Tatler*.

at the foundation of his theory for the advancement of poetry[5] and maintained it throughout his whole career.[6]

Dennis accepted Cicero's statement of the interdependence and relation of the arts;[7] and he paraphrased, in his dedication to the *Poems in Burlesque* Horace's words[8] about painting as a kind of poetry. To the other arts he paid little attention, save as they bore upon literature and especially upon poetry, for in his general indifference to any consideration of the prose forms of letters, he was a thorough neo-classicist. Poetry, he maintained,[9] is the noblest of the arts, for it "makes provision at the same time for the satisfaction of all the Faculties, the Reason, the Passions, the Senses." In so much as he considered that music did not meet the demands of reason, Dennis, in common with other critics of his day, placed it far below poetry; and he asserted[10] that to judge it "requires only a fine Ear, which the Footman often has a great deal finer than his Master."

With regard to the matter of imitation, a doctrine which lies at the basis of all critical theorizing, Dennis was in agreement with many of the prevalent views of his time. In France the Pléiade had substituted for the imitation of nature that of the classics; and in England Jonson had taken the position of advising young writers to chose an author and follow him till the copy might be mistaken for the principal.[11] These views were more or less strongly advocated by critics from Vossius[12] to Boileau[13] and found a most radical exponent in Dacier.[14] Though this attitude met with opposition, especially from such critics as St. Évremond,[15] it was commonly accepted when Dennis began his career. The ideas of the neo-classicists

[5] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 147.
[6] *Original Letters*, p. 169, p. 418.
[7] Preface to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers.*
[8] *Ars Poetica*, l. 361.
[9] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 168.
[10] Cf. Jonson's *Discoveries*, Boston, 1892, p. 49.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[12] *Opera*, Amsterdam, 1687, III, 8, 44.
[13] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 135.
[14] Preface to *Oeuvres du Horace*, Amsterdam, 1735, I, 53.
[15] *Works*, London, 1719, II, 272.

had, however, been perverted from Aristotle's conception of imitation as a representation of actual life. That school proceeded to emphasize and amplify his statement that poetry should deal with the probable rather than the actual and made it one of their commandments. Poetry, which is an expression of the universal, said Rapin,[16] is superior to history, which shows the particular; and Rymer, holding the same view, in condemning *King and No King* declared[17] that the lack of probability in that play lowered its value, so that instead of being superior to history, it was inferior to it. The neo-classicists also maintained that imitation should be according to the different types which Aristotle had outlined in the *Rhetoric*,[18] and which Horace had taken up in the *Ars Poetica*. This idea, of course, also tended toward making poetry universal rather than particular. The neo-classicists joined these conceptions and other dicta of Aristotle, such as the forming of the plot before the bestowing of names, with the moralistic conception of literature into a scheme that became generally recognized as proper and regular for constructing a play or an heroic poem. The writer should select a moral idea and exemplify it in a fable or plot, where the characters should represent universal types, even though they bore particular names. The neo-classicists urged that the great works of antiquity had been formed in this manner, so that Achilles, for example, was a universal type with certain characteristics. Against the acceptance of such beliefs, however, there was much protest: the earlier rationalists combatted them; and Dryden uttered his dissent. In his *Remarks upon Fresnoy's Art of Painting*, however, he expressed the conventional idea that the ancients had studied and knew nature, and that the moderns might best succeed by imitating them.

Dennis's earlier views of imitation were in general accord with these current neo-classical conceptions. Whoever invents

[16] Kennet, *Whole Critical Works of Mons. Rapin*, 1731, I, Ch. XXIV.

[17] *Tragedies of the Last Age, Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Common Sense of all Ages*, London, 1678, p. 59.

[18] Weldon, The *Rhetoric of Aristotle. Translated with an Analysis and Critical Notes*, London, 1886, p. 181.

an action, he maintained,[19] invents a fable. He then went on to affirm that it is the poet's business in representing characters to maintain them well, because nature is uniform; and he added that to follow nature is to follow the rules.[20] Historic examples are too particular to instruct, so the poet must have recourse to the more general ones of fiction.[21] In his later years Dennis maintained most of these views with a fair consistency; for example, a quarter of a century later, these ideas form the basis of his objections to plays written for special actors. He praised Vergil as deviating from historical truth to gain greater beauties for the *Aeneid,* though he condemned Shakspere's Roman plays as sinning against history and was equally severe with Addison's *Cato.* The composition of tragedy, he frequently asserted, demands a less faithful imitation than does that of comedy, for tragedy makes lighter demands upon probability and finds the wonderful more tolerable. To the Aristotelian view of the world of imitation as pleasing more than the actual world, which also found expression in Dryden[22] and elsewhere, Dennis gave a willing assent.

All of these beliefs were, for the most part, commonplaces in the critical thought of the time and found expression in the writings of many contemporary critics both French and English. But Dennis went beyond the common thought of his time by insisting in some of his writings that poetry should be considered and studied as the product of a creative mind. Like Addison he accepted in the main the psychology enunciated by Hobbes, and he attempted to apply it in an explanation of the process of literary creation many years before Addison took up the discussion of the imagination. Hobbes had defined[23] imagination as "conception remaining and little by little decaying from and after the act of sense" and had maintained[24] that images are either simple or compound, and that "the brain

[19] *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* p. 14.
[20] *Ibid.,* 106.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 48.
[22] Ker, II, 119.
[23] *Works,* 1740, IV, 9.
[24] *Ibid.,* III, 6.

or spirit being stirred by divers objects composeth an imagination of divers conceptions that appear single to the sense." The joy of composition comes from the sudden exaltation or pride of the soul at its own power.[25] He further urged that "all advancement cometh from the imagination" "guided by the precepts of true philosophy." The suspicion of the imagination which frequently cropped out in his work found numerous restatements in this age of growing rationalism, of which one of the assertions of Dryden may be taken as typical:[26] "Imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like a high ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment." Just what relation this ranging of the imagination should bear to the production of literature, the connection between the *furor poeticus* and reason, was a problem that began to impress itself upon the age. The recognition of the poetic frenzy, of the demands of the school of taste for a grace beyond art, and of the insistence of the rationalists upon exactness, all find expression in such theorizing about invention as that by Temple:[27]

"This was the celestial fire [*i. e.*, a heat of the brain] which gave such a pleasing motion or agitation to the minds of those men that have been so much admired in the world, that raised such infinite images of things agreeable to mankind—From this arises the elevation of genius which can never be produced by any art or study, by pains or by industry, which can not be taught by precepts or examples. . . . But though invention is the mother of poetry, yet the child . . . must be nourished with care, clothed with exactness and elegance, educated with industry, instructed with art, improved by application, corrected with severity, and accomplished with labours and time."

In his attempts to explain "the celestial fire of the writer,"[28] Dennis took as his starting point Hobbes's doctrine of the exaltation of spirit and declared[29] that the elevation of the

[25] Cf. Jonson's *Discoveries,* Boston, 1892, p. 55: "For all we do invent doth please us in the conception of birth, else we would never set it down."

[26] *Works,* IV, 450.

[27] *Works,* London, 1759, III, 401.

[28] Cf. Blackmore's preface to *Prince Arthur.*

[29] Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* which discusses the matter at length.

writer, which had formerly been considered a thing divine, was either a very common passion or a "complication of Common Passions." Happiness or felicity in composition, he maintained, affects the writer much as do any of the common joys of life: any piece of fortune produces first surprise, then joy, then an elevation or an exaltation of mind; and if the good fortune comes unexpectedly, it brings us astonishment and amazement at our own happiness. In literary composition the soul is exalted through the conception of a hint which it regards as peculiarly its own; and if the hint be great and elevated, it is "amazed with the unexpected view of its own surpassing power." This transport of the soul gives birth to an elevation of the expression, for all emotions, even such contrary ones as love and rage, in excess are furious. "Now it is certain that greatness of the mind is nothing but pride well regulated. Now as joy causes fury, and pride elevation, so astonishment gives vehemence to expression." "Genius," he defined as "the expression of a furious joy caused by the conception of an extraordinary hint;"[80] and he declared that the enthusiasm manifested in the highest forms of poetry consists of these three passions—joy, pride, and astonishment, either simple or complicated, arising from such thoughts as naturally carry these emotions with them.[81] Like Hobbes, Dennis distinguished vivid thoughts by calling them images, and he also maintained that these are best supplied by religious subjects.[82] All invention, he went on to affirm with Hobbes,[83] is the result of the confederated powers of the memory, imagination, and judgment. "For memory," he declared, "may justly be compared to the Dog that beats the Field, or the Wood, and that startles up the Game; Imagination is the Falcon that clips it upon its Pinions after it; and Judgment is the Falconer who directs the flight and governs the whole."

Dennis's beliefs regarding the inventive imagination were in general agreement with his doctrines of the emotions and might be characterized as a part of them. Even as early as the

[80] Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur.*

[81] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 32.

[82] *Works,* II, 425.

[83] *Remarks upon the Dunciad,* p. 22.

preface to his *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* written in 1692, Dennis's theorizing exhibits the conflict between the demands of emotion and those of regularity, which he once attempted to adjust by stating that while emotion is to be allowed its free play, its manifestations will be found to accord with reason. To his age Dennis stood as the champion of emotion as the basis of poetry, as an advocate of the exaltation and inspiration of the poet that so ill accorded with the prevailing spirit of the times that he was derisively dubbed "Sir Longinus." Of this Greek writer Dennis was a student; and his ideas regarding the sublime are in part echoes from *On the Sublime,* viewed, however, through the commentaries of Boileau.

That the poet is inspired had been taught by Platonism, reenforced by Caecilius, Longinus, and Horace, reaffirmed for Renaissance criticism by the Pléiade,[34] and accorded a conventional acceptance by the English writers of the seventeenth century.[35] On the other hand, however, it must also be remembered that for the age last mentioned enthusiasm conveyed the idea of fanaticism, and that madness was regarded as simply a surplus of emotion.[36] Furthermore, the rationalistic spirit of the times was, of course, opposed to granting much importance to emotion in poetry; and this opposition found expression in such declarations as that of Rapin:[37]

> "'tis in no wise true, that most believe, that some little mixture of madness goes to make up the character of the Poet; for though his discourse ought in a manner to resemble that of one inspir'd: yet his mind must always be serene that he may discern when to *let his muse run mad,* and when to govern his transports."

Dryden, however, was working his way toward a freer critical conception. In the preface to *Aureng-Zebe,* in 1675, he first drew upon Longinus, whom he declared next to Aristotle the greatest critic among the Greeks; and his discussion of emotion as the basis of poetry[38] shows him well in advance

[34] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance,* p. 174.

[35] See for examples *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* II, 286, 308.

[36] Hobbes's *Works,* 1740, III, 64.

[37] Rymer's translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle,* 1674, p. 6.

[38] *Works,* XI, 295.

of his time. It seems probable, however, that Dennis derived from Milton's theory and practice, rather than from Dryden, his insistence upon emotion as the basic element of poetry. Milton maintained that poetry is the sublime art,[39] and he represented the poet as soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and with his singing robes about him. Furthermore, he handed on these ideas to his nephew Edward Phillips, who repeated[40] them and emphasized them.

By 1692, if not earlier, Dennis was attracted to the writings of Milton and consequently to a fuller consideration of the emotional element in poetry. It is difficult to state whether his interest in Pindarics arose from this study; but it is quite clear[41] that he associated the sublimity of Milton with the manner of Pindar, and that he strove in practice to combine them. His efforts met with a certain success, for, as we have noticed, he gained the praise of Dryden and had come by 1697 to be regarded as the assertor of poetic rage.[42] Upon this emotional element he based his conception of poetry, which he defined[43] as "an imitation of nature by a pathetic and numerous speech." "Passion," he continued, "is the characteristical mark of poetry and consequently must be every where." It is impossible, he believed, that the greatest or enthusiastic passion should always be present in a poem, but there should be the lesser emotion or ordinary passion which is clearly comprehended by the reader. In explaining the difference between enthusiastic and ordinary passion Dennis insisted upon the following distinction:[44]

"Vulgar Passion or that which we commonly call Passion, is that which is moved by the Objects themselves, or by the Ideas in the ordinary course of Life, I mean the common Society which we find in the World . . . Enthusiastic Passion or Enthusiasm is a Passion which is moved by the Ideas

[39] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, 194.

[40] *Ibid.*, II, 259.

[41] "In writing these Pindarick verses I had still Milton in my eye and was resolv'd to imitate him as well as it could be done without receding from Pindar's manner." Preface to the *Court of Death*, 1695.

[42] "Congreve outrime and outrage Dennis," *Poem on the Peace*, Anon., 1697.

[43] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 23.

[44] *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, p. 15.

in Contemplation or in Meditation of Things, that belong not to common Life: Most of our Thoughts in Meditation are naturally attended with some sort and some degree of Passion, and this Passion, if it is strong, I call Enthusiasm: Now the Enthusiastic Passions are chiefly Six, Admiration, Terror, Horror, Joy, Sadness, Desire, caused by the Ideas occurring to us in Meditation, and producing the same Passions that the Objects of these Ideas give us of them. And here I desire the Reader to observe, that Ideas in Meditation, are often very different from what Ideas of the same Objects are, in the course of common Conversation. As for Example, the Sun mention'd in ordinary Conversation, gives the Idea of a round flat shining Body, of about Two Feet Diameter. But the Sun occurring to us in Meditation, gives the Idea of a vast and glorious Body, and the top of all visible Creation, attended with Admiration, and that Admiration I call Enthusiasm. So Thunder mention'd in a common Conversation, gives the Idea of a black Cloud, and a great Noise, which makes no great Impression upon us. But the Idea of it, occuring in Meditation, sets before us the most forcible, most resistless, and consequently the most dreadful Phenomenon in Nature: so that the Idea must move a great deal of Terror in Us, and 'tis this sort of Terror that I call Enthusiasm, And 'tis this sort of Terror or Admiration, or Horror, and so of the rest, which exprest in Poetry, makes that Spirit, that Passion, that Fire, which so wonderfully please."

In all probability Dennis based these ideas on his study of Locke's *Essay concerning the Human Understanding,*[45] which had appeared about a dozen years before the critic issued his chief discussion of the nature of poetry.

At his boldest Dennis went so far as to assert[46] that while "all other writers are made by precept, and formed by Art, the poet prevails by force of Nature, . . . and is sometimes by a spirit not himself exalted to Divinity." But more often through his career as a critic he was restrained by his respect for reason and regularity, so that he declared[47] that the poet must combine fury with sense. In the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* Dennis emphasized the necessity of the "fine frenzy" and said little of any dependence of the poet upon design; but his innate conservatism, reenforced by the spirit of the age, manifested itself in the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* where he took the less advanced position[48]

[45] For example, see Locke's *Essay,* Bk. II, Ch. I.

[46] *Usefulness of the Stage,* p. 44.

[47] Preface to *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose.*

[48] *Works,* II, 422.

that the poet must frame all with the idea of moving passion—the fable, the incidents, characters, and expression; while still later he repeatedly emphasized the neo-classical idea of each species exciting the emotion proper to its kind.[49]

Despite this growing conservatism, however, Dennis's attitude toward the emotions is markedly in advance of his age, which found, perhaps, its extreme representative in Shaftsbury, who insisted[50] ever on keeping the upper hand of all emotion, and who saw in good humor[51] the greatest security against enthusiasm. In direct opposition to Dennis he maintained that emotion might befit the ancients, but that it was ill becoming to the men of a later and more sophisticated age. He further declared[52] that "we are to work [rather] by weaning than by engaging the passions." In some of his later tracts, such as *Vice and Luxury,* Dennis remonstrated against such a restriction of the passions and urged that they should be directed rather than repressed. To us his insistence upon allowing a play of the emotions is of especial value as illustrating how no one attitude toward letters in his age ever gained complete ascendency, for his demand for passion in poetry was in direct opposition to the prevailing rationalism no less than his attempt to exalt the writings of the Hebrews, which we shall now discuss, was at variance with the spirit of neo-classicism.

IV

His Moralistic and Patriotic Conceptions of Poetry

Dennis's effort to reconcile poetry with the Christian religion was but one phase of a long struggle which had dated from the time of Muzio[1] to that of Boileau, St. Évremond, and Dryden. Against the use in poetry of the heathen divinities, which had become established as a characteristic of neo-classicism, came the religious revolt which found expression in such Christian poetry as that of Tasso and of Spenser,[2] and in France, despite

[49] E. g., *Original Letters,* p. 9.
[50] *Works,* 1900, I, 375.
[51] *Ibid.,* II, 35.
[52] *Ibid.,* II, 281.
[1] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance,* p. 129.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 161.

the pagan influence of the Pléiade, in Vauquelin's *Art Poétique* and in Du Bartas's *Uranie*.[3] Again, the question of the propriety of biblical themes for the stage came to an issue in France with Corneille,[4] who had vigorously defended their introduction. With the growth in popularity of the religious epic, about the middle of the seventeenth century, Desmaretes de Saint Sorlin[5] urged the use of the Christian marvels in poetry; but he and his followers were practically overwhelmed by Boileau, whose powerful influence was thrown for continuing the paganization of literature. Boileau's attitude was potent both at home and abroad; and his famous passage,

> "De la foi d'un chrétien les mystères terribles
> D'ornements égayés ne sont point susceptibles:
> L'Évangile à l'esprit n'offre de tous côtés
> Que pénitence à faire, et tourments mérités;"

was freqently cited by Dennis. The rationalistic view of this question found perhaps its best expression in St. Évremond, who, while blaming the moderns for lacking force to abandon the pagan gods for the Christian beliefs,[6] declared that the spirit of the existing religion was directly opposed to tragedy.[7]

In England the influence of the French religious epics is seen in such works as the *Gondibert* of Davenant, who defended himself in his preface for thus introducing the Christian persons on the ground that their actions would exert a more powerful influence for good than could those of pagan characters. His friend Cowley, too, in the notes to his *Davideis* and in the general preface to his poems, insisted upon the poet's having recourse to the treasure house of the Christian beliefs; and he called upon his contemporaries to rescue the divine art from the service of Satan, to which it had been perverted. Dryden and Dennis both spoke freely of Cowley and his work; and his beliefs and practices were not without their influence upon our critic's formulation of his theories in regard to the relation of religion and poetry.[8] Indeed the in-

[3] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 229.
[4] *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1819, III, 480.
[5] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, II, 334.
[6] *Works*, 1719, II, 13 ff., 272.
[7] *Ibid.*, II, 14.
[8] Dennis's *Works*, II, 446.

terest of Dennis and Dryden in the Pindaric ode,[9] of which Cowley was generally regarded as the foremost English writer, seems to have centered largely around the possibilities of using that form as a vehicle for religion. Dryden's interest in the relations of poetry and the Christian belief found its most notable expression in his utterances regarding the use of pagan divinities, or machines, in modern poetry. In answer to Boileau's contention that the Scriptures offered no supernatural persons suitable for poetry, he suggested[10] that the Christian poets had not recognized their own strength, for in the prophecy of Daniel they might find authority for ministering angels which would supply them with better machinery than that of the ancient gods. Dennis seems to have been attracted by this proposal,[11] for he put it into practice in his most pretentious poem, *Blenheim,* where Marlborough is represented as protected by a guardian angel and opposed by the spirits of discord. The latter part of this scheme is also of Dryden's suggestion.[12] Here it is also interesting to note that in his earlier years as a critic Dennis's attitude toward the use of machines, or supernatural agencies, was not consistent. His attempt to incorporate heavenly spirits in his poetry is quite at variance with his position in his *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* where he declared[13] that the Christian machines are quite out of nature and consequently cannot delight. The next year, however, he maintained[14] that machines are the very soul of poetry; while in 1701 he took the ground[15] that "the Mysteries of the Christian Religion are not to be mix'd with Fiction, and consequently it would be a hard matter to contrive Machines for an Epic Poem upon a Modern Christian Subject;" though he asserted in qualification, we may have the loftiest Christian poetry without machines. But the growing dogmatism of his later years finds no better illustration than his changing atti-

[9] *Ibid.,* I, 502.
[10] *Works,* XIII, 24 ff.
[11] Dryden once wrote to Dennis commending the plan. Ker, II, 279.
[12] Dryden's *Works,* XIII, 28.
[13] p. 125.
[14] *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind,* p. 114.
[15] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 134.

tude toward the poetic use of the supernatural; for the earlier hesitation gave way to the positive assertion that not only may machines be used, but that they are to be employed according to eight rules, which he proceeded to expound.[16]

The chief interest in Dennis's beliefs, however, lies not in his attitude toward the introduction of machines but in his scheme for joining religion and poetry, a plan which he considered quite his own.[17] It is evident, however, that as he was consciously influenced in formulating his views by Milton's practice in *Paradise Lost,* so he was also guided, perhaps unconsciously, by that writer's theories. Dennis's deep religious nature, with its strong tinge of positiveness frequently deepening into dogmatism, was unquestionably attracted in part to Milton, as Mr. Saintsbury has observed,[18] by that poet's "avowed intention to make his poem a theodicy;" but the exalted spirit of *Paradise Lost* and the mighty harmonies arising therefrom, as Dennis believed, fascinated him and led him to support his theory with numerous illustrations from Milton's epic.

Dennis's great scheme, promulgated in the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 1701, and partly systematized three years later in his *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* was an attempt to settle the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns then raging by showing that through the help of religion contemporary poets might hope to equal the classical literature.[19] Briefly put, his argument in the earlier treatise is this: Through the fall of man came the conflict between reason and passion, which has since been reconciled by the Christian religion. True religion seeks not to suppress the passions but

[16] *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock,* p. 23.

[17] Dennis calls his scheme "a piece of Criticism, which has, I know not how, escaped the French criticks." *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry.* It seems not unlikely that Dennis's interest in the possible advantages to be gained from uniting religion and poetry was quickened by the appearance in 1700 of Blackmore's *Paraphrase of the Book of Job, and other parts of the Scripture.*

[18] *History of Criticism,* II, 246.

[19] Dennis also believed that his scheme would exalt the poetry of England over that of her great rival, France. *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry.*

to exalt them, which is also the purpose of poetry, since by its very nature poetry rouses passion. In so much as divine poetry deals with the loftiest conceptions and emotions of which mankind is capable, it has the advantage over the classics of better meeting the demands of reason and of raising greater passion. This last contention is defended by several comparisons, in the manner of Rymer, of passages in Vergil, illustrative of enthusiastic passion, with others of a similar nature by Milton. In these comparisons the advantage is invariably declared to lie with the latter.

In the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* 1704, Dennis elaborated his scheme and endeavored to support it by reason, authority, and further illustration. Religious enthusiasm, he here contended, best supplies the qualities of emotional elevation as given by Aristotle, Hermogenes, and Longinus.[20] But his respect for regularity, which had been held in abeyance in the *Advancement and Reformation,* here asserted itself, so that he declared that poetry is to be established by the laying down of laws;[21] and he then gave eight rules for the proper regulation of enthusiasm. Of these laws the first may be cited as perhaps the best: "the Religion [of a poem] ought to be one, that the poet may be moved by it and that he may appear in earnest." In spite of this hobbling of Pegasus, the book is interesting and significant for its reaffirmation of passion as the soul of poetry, its consideration of the nature of enthusiasm, and its generous commendation of Milton. Any one of

[20] Dennis's argument based upon Aristotle is slight, consisting of a quotation from the *Rhetoric* to show that the use of figurative language, which is the natural speech of passion, is less appropriate to prose than to poetry. Dennis then declared it his belief that the Greeks called poetry the language of the gods because they always represented their divinities as speaking in verse. From Hermogenes he cited the passage concerning the qualities giving elevation to a discourse and showed how it helped to confirm his theory. He then quoted and considered in its relation to religion and poetry Longinus's description of the sublime as exalting the soul and giving it a larger idea of itself, "filling it with Joy, and a certain noble Pride, as if itself had produced what it barely reads." Dennis's *Works,* II, 427.

[21] Dennis would have urged in his own defense that nature, reason, and poetry are at the bottom one, and that nothing can really please that is contrary to the eternal laws of reason.

these features of Dennis's work we may note in passing, is enough to refute Mr. Saintsbury's statement[22] that our author shows the worst features of his critical tribe.

Dennis's insistence that the greater poetry should be religious is but a step beyond the position maintained by nearly all the critics of the age that poetry should be moral, or, rather, that it should have at its base a moral idea. This conception rested in part upon the well known Aristotelian precept that things should be represented not as they are but as they should be and upon the equally famous statement that poetry should be a mixture of history and fable. Poetry should be based upon history, the argument ran, because it cannot neglect the truth; and it should contain an element of fiction, because virtue unadorned would not be sufficiently surprising and delightful. Though Bacon had contended that the writer more often conceives the fiction before the moral than vice versa, the growing neo-classicism had tended to the opposite belief and had found a great champion in Jonson.[23] The neo-classical doctrine received additional confirmation from the authority of Rapin and of Le Bossu and reached its height with Dacier,[24] who declared that owing to the corruption of the race, mankind must be instructed through fables which had been invented to form manners. Homer, who had first used the fable, had represented Achilles as a man universal and allegorical, depicted largely for the purposes of moral instruction. Though these extreme views met with continual opposition from the English critics, the tendency of the times was toward a common acceptance of their modified forms. For example, Dryden in his later years expressed his approval[25] of Le Bossu's doctrine of first fixing the moral and then erecting the story, though he elsewhere affirms[26] that the fable is not the great masterpiece of tragedy but the foundation of it. Congreve prided himself upon his regularity in writing his *Double Dealer,* declaring in

[22] *History of Criticism,* II, 434.

[23] *Discoveries,* Boston, 1892, p. 73.

[24] *La Poétique D'Aristote Traduite En François, Avec Des Remarques,* Paris, 1692, Preface, iii.

[25] *Works,* VI, 266.

[26] "Heads of an Answer to Rymer."

his preface, "I designed the moral first, and to the moral I invented the fable;" while Farquhar, in his *Discourse on Comedy,* which for the most part is in advance of the criticism of his age, affirmed that the fox in the play is the same as the fox in the fable. The neo-classicists also maintained that if the reader insisted that he would read only for pleasure, the writer was to use such pleasure only as a means of instruction, a conception which received one of its most notable expressions by Dr. Johnson.[27]

With the conception of the fable and moral as just outlined Dennis grew into greater and greater accord. He reconciled the demands for profit and pleasure with his insistence upon passion by declaring that emotion is essential both to delight and to instruction;[28] and he further asserted that passion is the greatest requisite for the fable. As for the nature of the fable, he considered it "a discourse aptly contrived to form the manners of men by instruction disguised under the name of allegory."[29] "The action of a dramatic fable," he explained,[30] "is universal and allegorical, the characters are so likewise, Aesop does not represent a single animal [*e. g.,* a wolf] but shows the nature of that creature so far as the occasion where it appears, admits of. . . . The Dramatic Poet does not pretend to entertain us with particular persons, though he may give them particular names; but proposes to lay before us general and allegorical phantoms, to make them talk as persons compounded of such and such qualities would act on like occasion, in order to give proper instruction." In his *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers* Dennis declared that every true comedy should be a fable, though he considered that type of drama less adapted to inculcate great lessons than tragedy, which should always be a solemn lecture.[31] He recognized, however, that all English plays were not con-

[27] Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, 1765, xiv.

[28] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 27.

[29] *Stage Defended, from Scripture, Reason, and the Common Sense of Mankind,* 1726, p. 7.

[30] *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind,* 1698, pp. 7 ff.

[31] *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry.*

structed according to these theories, but he considered that through long custom the nation found these irregular dramas tolerable. He further maintained that the French, who had become habituated to art and conduct, disliked such plays as heartily as the Italians disliked the English Gothic cathedrals.

While Dennis's insistence upon religion, or at least morality, as an element in literature, had a certain liberalizing and broadening effect upon his criticism, it brought with it another and narrowing influence: it added to the positiveness of his assertions as a critic the dogmatism of the theologian. Pope came in for frequent attacks not only as a bad poet but also as the enemy of religion, who was suborning Homer to popish beliefs;[32] and Steele was debauching[33] the people and encouraging vice and folly. But if Dennis's intense moral earnestness thus impaired the value of his criticisms, it more than compensated for this loss by inciting him to break away from the conventional neo-classic and rationalistic standards of the time, and to advocate as the basis of poetry not reasonableness or wit but emotion. Furthermore, though we disagree with his moralistic conceptions, we must remember that many of the better English critics have held not dissimilar views as to the function of poetry.

Closely connected with Dennis's religious and moral conception of poetry was his patriotic ideal. Indeed, to his way of thinking, patriotism, religion, and art are inseparably connected; for not only did he consider religion the basis of all government, but he believed with Milton that liberty is essential to the flourishing of letters,[34] and that the prosperous nations are those that cultivate the arts.[35] In his attacks upon Steele, for example, Dennis urged[36] "all who are concerned for the Honour of the King to protest against the present management of the stage" as disgracing the nation and tending to ruin the related arts. The drama, he maintained in his reply to Law,[37] is powerful to inspire "the love of country, the

[32] *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer*, p. 34.
[33] Preface to the *Invader of His Country*.
[34] Preface to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, 1723.
[35] Dedication to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*.
[36] Preface to the *Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter*, 1722.
[37] *Stage Defended*, 1726, p. 30.

love of liberty, of virtue, and true glory;" and he then proceeded with the threefold assurance of a critic, a theologian, and a political partisan to show that the greatest enemies of the English stage had been the non-jurors. His ardent love for liberty, his earnest, if not always well directed, passion for the welfare of his country and countrymen must be recognized as an important element both in his criticism and in his plays and poems. Over half the prefaces of his dramas, to notice but a single class of his writings, contain statements that the following plays were written in behalf of liberty, which had ever been his "sole felicity,"[38] as well as "the continual theme of [his] pen, and the constant employment of [his] life."[39]

Like Dryden, who had early declared[39a] with Neander for England and liberty, Dennis placed great value on some of the older national writers because they were his countrymen. Jonson had been "an honour to Great Britain;"[40] and in a burst of patriotism our critic once declared[41] that not only were several things in Shakspere superior to any thing produced on the French stage, but his native ability had been so great that whoever "allows that Shakespear had learning and a familiar Acquaintance with the Ancients ought to be looked upon as a Detractor . . . from the Glory of Great Britain." Milton, too, had brought glory to Englishmen,[42] though they had but tardily given him the recognition so early and freely accorded him by the Italians. This patriotic motive, moreover, lies at the foundation of Dennis's greater critical writings of the earlier years of the eighteenth century. Poetry, he declared in the opening paragraph of the *Grounds of Criticism,* "has been driven and banished from every country except *England* alone; and it is even here so miserably fallen . . . that we have reason to apprehend it to be departing from hence too." It was in the service of religion and patriotism, then, that he developed his scheme for the restoration of poetry and exalted above the

[38] Preface to his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer.*

[39] *Original Letters,* p. 203.

[39a] In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* 1668.

[40] *Original Letters,* p. 402.

[41] *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation.*

[42] *Original Letters,* p. 78.

ancients Milton, the English protestant bard. This note of protest against the decay of poetry and the consequent dishonor and peril of the country grew louder and louder through the later years of Dennis's life till it became his Jeremiad; but in his bluff and earnest, though often misdirected, way he strove to render liberty and letters "perpetual in this Island."[48]

V

His Attitude toward the Rules

To show the manner in which poetry might be perpetuated in Great Britain, Dennis more than once quoted the famous statement of Milton's[1] that the youth should be taught "that sublime art which is in *Aristotle's Poetics, in Horace,* and the *Italian* commentaries, . . . what the laws are of a true *Epic* poem, what of a *Dramatic,* what of a *Lyric,* what *decorum* is, what are the great masterpieces to observe." With the attitude here expressed Dennis was in such thorough accord that he used this passage at the very beginning of his *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* which he designed as an introduction to his twice projected but never realized scheme for a comprehensive and thorough systematizing of poetical theory. Unlike Milton, however, Dennis and his contemporaries drew their critical ideas from the French[2] rather than from the Italians;[3] for in the latter quarter of the seventeenth century French thought and French arms were alike dominant. Like all other contemporary English critics Dennis was, of course, powerfully affected by the canons of the French neo-classicists, or the Gallo-Classicists as they have been called. As already stated, these critics are remembered chiefly as the champions of the rules, so that in determining Dennis's attitude toward that school, we must study his position regarding these formulated precepts. Did he accept these canons with little or no

[48] *Original Letters,* p. 203.

[1] In his *Treatise of Education, to Master Samuel Hartlib.*

[2] Cf. Pope's *Imitation of Horace,* 1st Ode, 2d Book, ll. 263–267.

[3] Dennis probably possessed a fair knowledge of the Italian critics, though they apparently had little direct influence upon him. See *Original Letters,* p. 78; Preface to *Miscellaneous Tracts,* p. viii.

reserve, as did some of his contemporaries, or did he maintain a more independent attitude?

We have already noticed some of the chief sources from which Dennis derived his respect for the rules, namely, from the critical comments of Rapin, Le Bossu, and Dacier[4] and from the practice and theory of Corneille. With the writings of all these he was well acquainted in the original; and he grew even more familiar with them through their recognition and more or less complete acceptance and promulgation by Dryden, Rymer, Roscommon, and Mulgrave. To the influence of Dryden especially was due no small part of Dennis's respect for these French writers and their rules. Indeed through a large part of his career Dryden maintained that the French were as superior to the English as critics as they were inferior to them as poets.[5] In his critical thinking, however, his respect for the rules frequently conflicted with his strong nationalism and critical acumen, so that it is not surprising that he should maintain that if Aristotle could have seen the *Cinna*,[6] he would have altered his opinion regarding

[4] "There [at the Universities] they grow familiar with the Title pages of ancient and modern Authors, and will talk of Aristotle, Longinus, Horace, Scaliger, Rapin, Bossu, Dacier, as freely as if born acquaintance: Their mouths are filled with the Fable, the Moral, Catastrophe, Unity, Probability, true Sublime, Bombast, Simplicity, Magnificence, and all the critical Jargon which is learned in a quarter of an Hour, and answers to talk of one's whole life after." James Ralph, the *Touchstone*, 1728, p. 161.

"Mr. Congreve informs me that I talk of the pedantical cant of Fable, Intrigue, Discovery, of Unities of Time. He means the pedantical Cant of Aristotle, and Horace, of Bossu and Corneille, of Rapin and Mr. Dryden; that is, of the best Criticks both Ancient and Modern upon the Subject." Collier's *Defense of the Short View*, p. 80.

"Whoever will be at pains to read the Commentators on Aristotle, and Horace's Art of Poetry; or that will but carefully consider Rapin, Dacier, and Bossu, those great masters among the French, and the judicious remarks of our own Mr. Rymer, . . . will soon be able to see wherein the Heroick Poems that have been publish'd since Virgil by the Italians, French, and English Wits have been defective, by comparing them with the rules of writing set down by those great Masters." Blackmore's preface to *Prince Arthur*.

[5] Ker's Dryden, II, 178.

[6] Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*.

the nature of the catastrophe. Elsewhere he maintained[7] that genius needs all possible reenforcement from learning, but that a writer should often break a lesser or mechanic rule for gaining a higher beauty, since the rules are founded both "on right reason and the practice of the best masters."

These dicta of Dryden's were accepted by Dennis, who insisted even more strongly than his master upon regarding reason and nature as the basis of the rules. At the outset of his career he emphasized the idea that "the rules of Aristotle are nothing but nature and good sense reduced to method;"[8] and two years later he declared[9] that they are "simply an observation of Nature. For Nature is Rule and Order in itself; and there is not one of the Rules that might not be used to evince this." Further quotation on this point is perhaps unnecessary; but we may note that in practically all of the many criticisms where he speaks of the nature of the rules, he insists that they are the dictates of reason, or that they "represent the order found in nature." In his most elaborate discussion of the rules and their value, written when he was at his best as a critic,[10] we discover an interesting mixture of his rationalistic and moralistic tendencies with those of the school of taste. These discussions show that the scientific discoveries of the time had emphasized for Dennis, as for others of his age, the idea of a rational order governing through the universe, so that he considered that God himself is best manifested through his laws, and that the works of God are perfect in that they exhibit the operation of perfect rule and order. At the creation, Dennis argued, man, too, had been in harmony with the great universal order and in every action had manifested its workings. Through his transgression of this regularity, especially through bringing his passions and reason into conflict, man had fallen. To restore the race to its pristine conformity and harmony, and

[7] *Works*, VIII, 374.

[8] *Impartial Critick*, p. 49. The source of this idea is Rapin, from whom Dryden, Dennis, and Pope derived it.

[9] *Works*, II, 532.

[10] Discussed at length in Part II of his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, 1701.

consequently to happiness is, Dennis believed, the great purpose of all the arts, but more especially of poetry. To accomplish this reformation, the arts themselves must be reestablished through the observance of the rules.

His beliefs concerning the validity of these rules, however, were much more liberal than were the conceptions of most of his fellow critics. For example, he went beyond most of his contemporaries in working toward a realization that the effect, rather than the means, is after all the important thing. Thus he urged[11] that

> "as in some of the numerous parts that constitute this beauteous all, there are some appearing irregularities, which parts notwithstanding contribute with the rest to complete the Harmony of universal Nature; and as there are some seeming Irregularities even in the wonderful Dispensations of the Supreme and Sovereign Reason, as the oppression of the good, and the flourishing of the bad, which yet at bottom are rightly adjusted, and rightly compensated, and are properly appointed by Divine Foreknowledge for the carrying on the Profound Design of Providence; so if we may compare great things with small, in the accomplish'd Poem, some things at first sight may be seemingly against Reason, which yet at the bottom are perfectly regular, because they are indispensably necessary to the admirable conduct of a great and just Design."

Dennis recognized Aristotle, of course, as the great expositor of the rules, and throughout his critical career he manifested a profound respect for the precepts of the Stagirite. But Dennis was by no means his blind partisan. He maintained, for example, that Aristotle's observations on the epic were limited by their having been based upon the practice of Homer; and that *Paradise Lost,* in so much as it deals not with the strife of man with man but of the devil with man, "being so very different from what Homer or Aristotle ever thought of, could not possibly be subjected to their Rules, either for the Characters or the Images." Moreover, Milton's subject, by its very nature, "threw him upon new Thoughts, new Images, and an original Spirit, all new and different from those of Homer and Virgil."[12]

In a word, then, we may say that Dennis studied carefully

[11] *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry.*

[12] *Specimen,* prefatory to the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry.*

and valued highly the practice of the ancients, but that instead of being a "violent defender of antiquity," as has been asserted,[13] he protested repeatedly and vigorously against rendering any servile and unquestioning obedience to the writers and critics of Greece and Rome. He recognized that these rules were mere means for attaining an end,[14] and that no observance of them could make amends for a want of genius.[15] Furthermore, he declared with Dryden that these precepts vary in power and validity, and that a lesser or mechanic rule may be set aside for a greater.[16] His ideas of the rules illustrate well how his moralistic, or perhaps better his theological view colored most of his theorizing, but still more noticeably they emphasize his thoroughgoing rationalism; for in every one of his criticisms in which he discusses the nature of these canons, he insists that they are the formulated precepts of nature and reason.

In his attempt to indicate the relation of genius and the rules Dennis's respect for neo-classical precepts clashed with his regard for the emotional element in literature. Poetical genius he defined[17] as "the power of expressing passion worthily," a force which enables a writer to treat his theme with "a dignity worthy of its greatness." "Yet 'tis Art," he urged,[18] "that makes a subject very great, and consequently gives occasion for a great Genius to show itself." Elsewhere he declared[19] that there never was a great genius without great judgment, and that the greater the genius of the writer the more closely he had followed the rules. Occasionally, however, his admiration for poetic enthusiasm conflicted with his

[13] Charlanne, *L'Influence Française en Angleterre au XVIIe Siècle*, p. 533.

[14] *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, Ch. II.

[15] Preface to *Iphigenia*. Cf. Dryden's letter to Dennis in Dennis's *Works*, II, 504.

[16] *Remarks upon Cato*, p. 40: "'Tis eternally the duty both of the Ancients and the Moderns, to break through a less important Rule, when without that Infringement the greater one must be violated." Cf. *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 14.

[17] *Advancement and Reformation*, p. 46.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 64. Cf. *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 158.

[19] *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, p. 106.

respect for regularity, as is seen in his assertion that[20] Milton's genius cannot be reduced to an art. Felicity rather than art, he affirmed, characterized Milton's choice of a subject in *Paradise Lost,* "a theme which often furnished him with the greatest of Ideas, which in turn suppli'd him with the greatest Spirit." But that this choice of subject was the result of a happy chance rather than art is shown by his attempting the treatment of *Paradise Regained,* which Vergil, for example, would have recognized "could never supply him with the ideas, nor with the spirit."

In the controversy of the ancients and moderns then raging, which was a very natural outgrowth of the neo-classical discussions, Dennis took what he called a "middle position."[21] Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy,* 1693, had brought to England the discussion of this recurring question that had been revived in France;[22] and Dryden, Temple, and a dozen others had expressed their views. Dennis asserted[23]

"'Tis ridiculous and pedantic to imagine that the natural powers of the soul were stronger or more excellent in the Ancients than they are in the Moderns. As to Experience, we have vastly the advantage of them. . . . Not but that at the same time I assert the equality of the Faculties of the Moderns, and the advantage of their Experience, I freely acknowledge the actual Preheminence that several of the Ancients had over the Moderns; but . . . that . . . proceeds from accidental Causes, and not from any Superiority of Faculties in those Ancient Authors."

In spirit Dennis was really with the moderns, for his scheme for the reformation of poetry was frankly intended to raise them to the level of the ancients, whose superiority, he maintained,[24] was due to their combining religion with poetry. In the epic, pastoral, and amorous poetry, in which the moderns could not make full use of their religion, he believed the preeminence of the ancients was firmly established. In such forms as comedy and satire, which are independent of religion, the

[20] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* p. 3.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Rigault's *Histoire de la Quarrelle des Anciens et des Modernes,* Paris, 1856. See also *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, lxxxviii.

[23] *Epistle Dedicatory* to the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry.*

[24] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* p. 14.

moderns, with Jonson and Boileau, had born away the prize. He further maintained that the ancients had surpassed in the greater, or Pindaric, ode and in tragedy; but that by infusing religion with their writings the moderns might attain to the same excellence. In this matter, as in others concerning the rules and their validity, Dennis's strong, independent judgment battled with the critical authority of his times and was never completely conquered by it. If he owned the validity of these rules attributed to the ancients, he did so only after submitting them to the tribunal of reason; and he ever insisted that no acquaintance with the rules and no observance of them could save the writer who lacked the touch of genius.

VI.

Dennis and the School of Taste

Though Dennis's struggles toward freer critical beliefs are interestingly exemplified in his discussions of the neo-classical rules, they are, perhaps, even better illustrated in his attitude toward the conceptions of the school of taste, which was tending to recognize the importance of environment in the production of letters, and to account for a grace in them beyond the reach of the rules. First of all we may note that though Dennis sometimes distinguished between taste and judgment in the criticism of letters,[1] he more commonly considered the latter one of the qualities of the former. In his earlier writings,[2] he went so far as to make taste a subjective thing, declaring that what is called good sense is not sufficient to form a good taste in poetry, even though it should be joined with an inclination for the art and "with a tolerable share of experience in it." If it were, he maintained, the taste of all men would be alike. Men may be biased in their judgments and have no knowledge of the rules and of genius and may still be good judges of certain forms of lyric poetry; but without these advantages they can never be "qualified to judge of the greater Poetry."[3] This last judgment, which switches

[1] In the *True Character of Mr. Pope*, p. 12.

[2] *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, pp. 40–42.

[3] Dryden voiced much the same idea in his preface to *All for Love*, Ker, I, 196.

from the suggestion of the preceding statement, is decidedly neo-classical; and Dennis then proceeds to maintain a rationalized standard of taste, and to prove by rule that Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* could not possibly be pleasing to men of taste. The above statement, however, was rather an *obiter dictum,* and Dennis's more carefully considered and formal utterance regarding the matter of taste appeared in his *Large Account,* prefatory to the *Comical Gallant,* 1702. In handling this subject, in which he considered himself a pioneer, Dennis asserted that the qualities requisite for judging poetry (for whoever possesses them has a good taste) are largely the same as those needed for its production. These are great parts, a generous education, and due application. By great parts Dennis explained that he meant "a warm Imagination and a solid and piercing Judgment." A generous education, he continued, consists not so much in a knowledge of the classics as of the world and mankind. Due application requires both leisure and serenity; the former, because poetry is of such dignity as to demand the whole man; and the latter that the writer may be free to enter into a full consideration of his theme and characters. Dennis then proceeded to base on these distinctions a comparison of the taste at the time of Charles II with that of his own day, and by a penetrating study of the conditions of the two ages to show that the taste of the Town just after the Restoration was better than that when Anne was crowned. He urged the greater prevalence of education in the earlier age, the respect paid those of taste by their inferiors, the security from political anxiety, and the general sway of pleasure, and declared that this state of things had gradually given away in his own time to an overwhelming concern regarding the national affairs, to an increase in the number of newly rich and of foreigners, and to other such unfavorable conditions. Thus had come about the prevailing decay of taste. Whether or not we agree with Dennis's analysis of existing conditions—and it certainly is very suggestive—we must be impressed by the attitude toward literature here assumed in the recognition of the influence of the circumstances of production upon the character of letters, a point of view

quite different from the conventionl subservience to the established neo-classical rules.

Dennis's insistence upon considering literature from the standards of the writer and the reader, his attempts to analyze the conditions making for the production of letters, and his recognition of social and political conditions as influencing taste, all ally him with the school of taste and open a field of criticism which we can but wish he had penetrated more deeply. The recognition of environment as an element to be considered by the critic was at least as old as Horace and passed current in the thought of the late seventeenth century. Dryden quoted[4] the Roman critic's famous statement concerning Lucillius "*Si foret hoc nostrum delapsus in aevum;*" and both the French and English critics of the time recur to the idea.[5] But it was with St. Évremond that the emphasis on environment was the most noticeable. He boldly declared that Aristotle's rules are good, but not for all time;[6] and he stressed the effect of religion and government upon the drama in a way that is clearly reflected in Dennis's *Impartial Critick*. In this early tract Dennis answered Rymer's plea for the introduction of the Greek chorus into the English drama.[7] The opening paragraph of our critic's discussion may be quoted as typical of the better argument he employs:

"Upon reading Mr. Rymer's late Book, I found the Design of it was to make several Alterations in the Stage, which instead of reforming would ruine the English Drama. For to set up the Grecian model among us with success, it is absolutely necessary not only to restore both their Religion and their Polity but to transport us to the same Climate in which Sophocles and Euripides writ; or else by reason of these different circumstances, several things which were graceful and decent to them, must seem ridiculous and absurd to us, as several things which would have appeared highly extravagant to them, must look proper and becoming to us."

[4] Ker, I, 163.

[5] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, xxxvi; II, 287, 303. Rymer, however, urged that nature and man remain the same through all ages. *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 6.

[6] *Works*, 1719, II, 12.

[7] See also Dryden's *Works*, XIII, 324. The French drama of the fifteenth century had employed the chorus, and the Italians used it in

These are the words of the critic as influenced by the school of taste[8] and especially by St. Évremond.[9]

Dennis's idea of the influence of climate upon literature, which was another of the notable conceptions of the school of taste, also deserves passing mention. Sprat had censured the English for their melancholy dumpishness,[10] and Temple,[11] Addison,[12] Defoe, and others reechoed the idea. Dennis frequently referred to the national moroseness and spleen, the most notable instance being that in his *Usefulness of the Stage,* where his statement that the spleen made the nation prone to rebellion was responsible for his indictment by the Middlesex grand jury.[13]

In this connection we may also recall Dennis's consideration of the psychology of the writer and the reader. We have already discussed one feature of this question in considering his attitude toward enthusiasm in composition, and we have also noted that the assumption and statement of the common nature of taste in the reader and in the writer lies at the base of his argument in the *Large Account.* Dennis was also one of the earliest English critics to comment on "those Longings which by their pleasant Agitations, at once disturb and delight the Mind, and cause the prime satisfaction of all those readers who

tragedy down through the seventeenth century. Early in the seventeenth century the French dropped the use of the chorus; but later Racine restored it, and Dacier defended its employment. In England Milton had advocated in the preface to *Samson Agonistes* the restoration of the chorus; and Rymer, influenced by Rapin and Dacier, had introduced a chorus into his *Edgar* and defended the practice in his *Short View of Tragedy,* 1693.

[8] See also his *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 12; *Usefulness of the Stage,* Ch. III; *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* p. 15.

[9] Dennis's whole attitude in this essay shows clearly the influence of St. Évremond, especially of his *Fragments sur les Anciens, Oeuvres Meslées,* Paris, 1689, pp. 464 ff. For St. Evremond's ideas concerning the influence of climate on letters see *cit. sup.,* p. 563.

[10] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* II, 118. Cf. also the preface to Bossuet's *Maxims and Reflections upon Plays. Written in French by the Bp. of Meaux And now made English.* London, 1699.

[11] Temple *Of Poetry, Works,* 1757, III, 426.

[12] 179th *Spectator.*

[13] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, ci.

read only to be delighted."[14] This recognition of the appeal to the reader's emotion as opposed to his intellect found expression in the current antithesis of the head and heart (esprit et coeur) which we have noticed as attributed by Bouhours to Voiture. This phrase gained currency in England during the last years of the seventeenth century and was frequently used by Dennis. How well the contrast it implied agreed with his conception of poetry is illustrated by his condemnation of wit:[15] "A Poet is obliged to speak always to the heart. And it is for this reason, then, that Point and Conceit and all they call Wit, is to be banished from true Poetry; because he who uses it speaks to the head alone." In this same early critique he reiterates this contrast by maintaining that "The pathetic, speaking to the heart," is scarcely in Blackmore; and he also uses this same distinction in one of his latest works,[16] where he states that whatever Terrence says touches his heart.

With another view held by the later disciples of taste who were making a compromise with the prevailing rationalism, Dennis was in agreement, namely, the belief that in language and expression there is a point of perfection, and that whatever falls on either side of this point misses the highest beauty. This view, which found its best formulation in La Bruyère,[17] is exemplified in Dennis's early contention[18] that for each sentiment or thought there is a fitting degree of passion and that every expression "above or below" is improper. Somewhat similarly he maintained[19] that every language has its particular point and time of perfection. The poet is most fortunate who writes in an age when the language has reached that point, though his verse need not grow obsolete, if, at the time he wrote, the tongue had attained a certain harmony.

Dennis also advocated another conception of the school of taste,[20] namely, that the critic should be concerned with

[14] *Remarks upon Cato*, p. 16.
[15] *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, p. 186.
[16] *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, p. 31.
[17] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, I, xcviii.
[18] Preface to *On the Death of Queen Anne*.
[19] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 19.
[20] *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Cent.*, I, xcviii.

finding the beauties rather than the faults of a writer; and though his practice in his later years was at variance with this opinion, he maintained it, in theory at least, throughout his life. This conception was by no means novel. Dryden had declared in 1669[21] that "there is much ill nature and little judgment in finding the mistakes of a writer," and had repeated[22] the statement in his last years. This "beauty-blemish" conception, which was as old as Horace's "*Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis offendar maculis,*"[23] received fresh emphasis, as we have noted, from Boileau's translation of Longinus in 1674. Dennis early accepted[24] and voiced this thought with its implied emphasis on individual charm. Later he subordinated this demand for beauties in a poem or play to that for genius,[25] declaring that where the latter was lacking he had no eye for the former. He recognized, even in his last years,[26] that greater beauties may occasionally be shown without the rules, but he maintained that in general the beautiful is most effectively attained through regularity. On the whole these different conceptions of the school of taste, such as the recognition of environment as affecting the production of letters, the awakening interest in the psychology of the writer and the reader, and the shifting of emphasis from criticism to appreciation, tended decidedly to broaden Dennis's critical thinking; and we can only regret that he never carried farther his consideration of these tendencies, which he began in his *Large Account of Taste* and projected on a more comprehensive plan in his unrealized *Large Account of our Most Celebrated English Poets Deceas'd.* He never renounced these conceptions of taste just outlined, but in his later years he rather stressed with increasing insistence the importance of the rules as the embodiment of law and order in the world of

[21] Preface to *Tyrannic Love.*

[22] Introduction to the "Heads of an Answer to Rymer."

[23] Quoted by Dennis in the preface to his translation of Burnet's *Treatise on Departed Souls.*

[24] Preface to the *Impartial Critick* and preface to *Remarks on Prince Arthur.*

[25] *Original Letters,* p. 292.

[26] Nichols's *Theatre,* II, 379.

letters. Nevertheless we may well remember that the writings of his better period show him in full sympathy with the attitude toward literature held by the school of taste and in thorough agreement with its principal beliefs.

VII

The Great Types of Literature

Turning now from the discussion of Dennis's attitude toward some of the chief tenets of the different schools of his time to his views regarding the various types of literature, we may note that in common with his age he laid great stress upon the importance of distinguishing the different species of letters. Aristotle's emphasis of the various classes of literature, together with his statement that each type is to produce a pleasure peculiar to its kind, had been seized upon by the neoclassicists and given a place near the corner stone of their critical structure. Through Scaliger and the Pléiade, down through Boileau, came the exaltation of the type, till Shaftsbury went so far as to declare[1] that "the main matter [of writing] is to keep these provinces [of the types] distinct and to settle their boundaries." Against this excessive reverence for the type was directed frequent satire—from Polonius's speech to Gay's *What-d'-Ye-Call-It;* but the idea had flourished, and respect for the type dominated the critical thinking of Dennis's time. Milton, indeed, saw in some of the books of the Bible examples of these genres—the book of Job he considered a short epic[2]—and after him Dennis voiced the same beliefs. Our critic also accepted and continually maintained the idea that each type is to please and to instruct through its own proper passion—the epic through admiration, tragedy through terror and pity, and comedy through the *ridiculum.* But Dennis's calm statement of belief in each type's affording a pleasure peculiar to its kind, which appeared in such an early work as the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* grew to a very

[1] *Works,* 1900, I, 232.

[2] In the Second Book of the *Reason of Church Government Urg'd Against Prelaty,* 1641.

positive certainty in the *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism* and to the utterance of infallibility in the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*. It is interesting, however, to note in this connection that his increase in controversial bitterness unquestionably affected his judgment in this as in other matters. The old critic instinctively sought some fixed canons for testing new poems and plays; and he was, in his later years at least, attracted by the very definiteness of the neo-classical scheme.

In centering his critical interest upon poetry and practically ignoring prose, Dennis was merely accepting the current neo-classical attitude. Poetry is more harmonious than prose he maintained,[3] because it is more pathetic. Measures and numbers, he repeatedly declared,[4] are not sufficient to constitute poetry; passion must everywhere prevail. He divided poetry into two classes,[5] the greater and the lesser,—the former including the epic, tragedy, and the greater lyric; the latter comedy, satire, the little ode, and the pastoral.[6] Only the greatest poetry is capable of the most exalted emotion, though lesser passion should characterize both kinds. He accepted the conventional analysis of poetry into fable, manners, thought, and expression and used this division, more or less consistently, in his criticism of literature.

Speculation regarding one of these great types, the epic, began in England with Harrington's *Apology for Poetry*, which marks the first appearance in that country of Aristotle's theory. Through the first half of the seventeenth century interest in the epic grew rapidly and found expression in the numerous attempts in that form both in England and in France.[7] In 1675 appeared Le Bossu's *Traité du Poeme Epique*, a systematic consideration of the epic, based upon Aristotle, which met with great favor. Boileau praised the work most highly;[8] Dryden,

[3] Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur*. Preface to *Blenheim*.

[4] Especially in the *Remarks on Prince Arthur* and in the *Remarks upon Cato*.

[5] *Works*, II, 422; *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 48.

[6] Cf. the 12th *Guardian*.

[7] For a fuller discussion of this subject see Ker's *Dryden*, I, xvii.

[8] *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1819, II, 259.

as we have noted, added his applause for the critic who had given such exact rules; and Dennis declared that no modern had understood the epic till Le Bossu had unraveled it.[9] In the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* which has been characterized as one of the earliest, if not the first, English book review, Dennis applied Le Bossu's scheme to the judgment of Blackmore's fashionable epic. He began with the French critic's definition of the epic and in general, through his incomplete criticism,[10] followed with little essential variation Le Bossu's ideas and plan of treatment.[11] His method may, in general, be characterized as an explanation, comment, and application of Le Bossu's system in judging *Prince Arthur.* Dennis, however, in recognizing the authority of Le Bossu and his great source Aristotle, insisted repeatedly that their precepts were sound not because they themselves uttered them, but because they had based their rules upon reason.[12]

In a letter to Sir. Richard Blackmore[13] Dennis summarized his views on the epic either explicit or implicit in his judgment of *Prince Arthur.* These views are, with slight variations, equally applicable to his criticisms of the plot, or fable, and the characters in other types of literature. An epic, he explained, must possess a fable which shall have unity, and which shall exist for the sake of the moral, conveyed in the form of an allegory. Of this action admiration should be the predominant quality. The instruction from the poem must be general, and

[9] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 200.

[10] Dennis promised to complete the criticism of *Prince Arthur,* if the public interest demanded, by discussing in another volume the thoughts and expression of the poem. Evidently the public considered one volume enough, for he never continued the discussion.

[11] The following comparison of Dennis's *Remarks* with the *Traité du Poeme Epique* indicates the most notable of the direct borrowings from the French critic:

Remarks:	1;	13	17;	18;	24;	28;
Traité:	I, 4;	I, 70;	I, 170–174;	I, 169, 175, 176;	I, 216;	I, 169;
Remarks:	36;	44;	45;	46;	51;	52;
Traité:	I, 35;	II, 31;	II, 32;	II, 33;	II, 37;	II, 89;
Remarks:	53;	53;	55;	55.		
Traité:	II, 82ff.;	II, 100;	II, 102–104;	II, 111–118.		

[12] *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* p. 3.

[13] *Original Letters,* pp. 1 ff.

the action and characters must "remain general even after the imposition of names;" for if they were particular, they would produce no general instruction. Dennis then maintained that the epic poet must have his moral clearly in mind before he forms his action. "Can any one believe," he demands, "that Aesop first told the Story of a Cock and Bull, and afterwards made a Moral to it? Or is it more reasonable to believe, that he made his Moral first, and afterwards to prove it, contrived his Fable?[14] Now I know no difference that there is, between one of Aesop's Fables, and the Fable of an Epic Poem, as to their Nature, tho' there may be many and great ones as to their Circumstances." These views held a place in Dennis's critical thinking from the *Remarks on Prince Arthur* to those on the *Rape of the Lock;* and though they met with an occasional protest, such as that of Parnell[15] about Homer's writing fables and others finding the morals, they held common sway through the age.

As a corollary to his theory regarding the nature of the plot, Dennis asserted[16] that to give instruction the characters of an epic[17] must be universal and allegorical, even after the imposition of names. This contention had, of course, come in part from Aristotle's dicta, as had also the belief that the proper kind of emotion—amazement in the epic, terror and pity in tragedy, etc.—should reign in the characters. From Aristotle and Le Bossu was derived Dennis's definition of the manners as the means of representing each person in his proper character, and of the sentiments as the expression of the manners. The characters, he further maintained with Le Bossu, are to be good, "like," convenient, and equal;[18] or, as he explained it, to be fitting to the kind of person, resembling the historical statements regarding him, becoming to his age, country, and sur-

[14] For an expression of similar views by Dryden, see Ker, I, 213.

[15] *Poems on Several Occasions,* Dublin, 1776, p. 99.

[16] *Original Letters,* p. 3.

[17] Dennis applied these same rules to the characters in tragedy and comedy. With slight modifications all that has been said of the epic is equally applicable to his views regarding dramatic plot and characters.

[18] Dryden, too, adopted from Le Bossu this scheme for judging characters. Ker, I, 214.

roundings, and steadily maintained. These conceptions, which owed much to Horace,[19] gave little or no place for character development[20] and fostered the representation of man rather than men. They were softened somewhat in Dennis's earlier writings by his insistence that the characters must be touched with passion,[21] though later he valued more and more their conformity with the standards just discussed.

Closely connected with this conception of character, and in part an outgrowth of it, was Dennis's acceptance of the theory of poetic justice, which, though more commonly associated with his ideas of the drama, was also applied by him to the epic and may, perhaps, best be noticed here.[22] The conception of poetic justice arose in part, as Professor Spingarn has stated, from the Aristotelian ethics of distributive justice, though the Stagirite had nowhere commended the idea in his *Poetics* but had rather condemned its application to tragedy. Corneille stated that his age had made the belief its own,[23] and wavering as he was in his critical conceptions, he did much to popularize the idea in France.[24] In England Bacon had leaned toward an acceptance of this doctrine, for, as he puts it,[25] "true history propoundeth the success and issue of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence." A little later Ben Jonson, foreshadowing the term poetic justice, had asserted in his preface to *Volpone,* that it is "the

[19] *Ars Poetica,* ll. 127 ff.

[20] ". . . a Poet who designs to give a true Draft of Human Life and Manners, must consult the Universal Idea and not particular Persons. For example, when the Poet would draw the Character of a covetous and revengeful Person, he is not to draw after Lucius or Cassius; but to consult the Universal Pattern within him, and there to behold what Revenge and Covetousness would do in such and such natures." *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* p. 31. See also *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, lxxviii.

[21] *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* p. 128.

[22] For a brief history of the idea of poetic justice, see *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* I, lxxviii.

[23] *Oeuvres,* Paris, 1862, I, 58.

[24] Charlanne, *L'Influence Française en Angleterre,* Paris, 1906, p. 541. Cf. also St. Évremond's *Works,* 1719, II, 22.

[25] *Advancement of Learning,* London, 1808, II, 167.

office of a comic poet to imitate justice." Dryden, who had declared for poetic justice in the preface to *Troilus and Cressida,* in the dedication to the *Spanish Friar,* and in the preface to his translation of the *Aeneid,* was, probably, influenced somewhat by Bacon's authority, but still more potently in this matter by that of Rymer. This last named critic had found the idea strongly advocated in Rapin's remarks on Aristotle, which he had translated into English. He made the belief his own, introduced the term "poetic justice" into English,[26] and stood as the particular champion of the doctrine. From him the theory was passed on to Dennis.

Dennis's ideas of poetic justice were a not illogical outgrowth of his conceptions of plot structure and of character portrayal. His argument in favor of the theory may be stated thus:[27] If the aim of the epic and of tragedy be to instruct, they must be based on the "Universal Moral, which is the foundation of all Morals," namely, "That he who does good and perseveres in it, shall always be rewarded, and that he who does ill and perseveres in it, shall always be punished." This reward, he continued, "must always attend and crown good Actions, not some times only, for then it would follow, that a perseverance in good actions has no Rewards, which would take away all poetical Instruction, and indeed every sort of Moral Instruction, resolving Providence into Chance or Fate."[28] It is easy to see why Dennis should champion this theory of poetic justice when we consider how fundamental he considered it in his moralistic justification of the rules; for to his way of thinking there could be no regular epic or drama that did not embody a fable, nor any fable without a moral, nor any moral without poetic justice. "What can be the moral," he queries, "when the good and bad are confounded by Destiny, and

[26] "Mr. Rymer was the first who introduced it [the term poetic justice] into our native Language." *Original Letters,* p. 410.

[27] Unless otherwise stated the following passages are based upon Dennis's letter to Blackmore, in the *Original Letters,* p. 1 ff.

[28] "The good must never fail to prosper and the bad to be punished; otherwise the Incidents, and particularly the Catastrophe, which is the Grand Incident, are likely to be imputed to chance rather than to Almighty Conduct and Sovereign Justice." *Original Letters,* p. 376.

perish alike promiscuously?"[29] As a further reason for measuring out just rewards and punishments to poetic creations Dennis urged that as "man is finite and too hollow a creature to know another thoroughly, he must needs leave this final Judgment of a wicked neighbor to the Infinite, who comprehends all motives."[30] But dramatic and epic "Persons," he continued, are the "Creatures of the Poet, who must not only know the extent of their Guilt and what they ought to suffer," but must also make these things clear to the reader or hearer. Then too, these poetic creations are without reserve: we know their inmost thoughts and feelings and in consequence may pass judgment upon them. Furthermore, Dennis was prompt to grant that in the world about us men do not always fare as they deserve, and that only with the judgments of another life are these inequalities adjusted; but he argued repeatedly and vigorously that

> "Poetical Phantoms are of short duration, through the whole extent of whose duration we can see at once, which continues no longer than the reading of the Poem, and that being over the Phantoms are to us nothing, so that unless our Sense is satisfy'd of the Reward that is given to this Poetical Phantome, whose whole duration we see thro' from the very beginning to the end; instead of a wholesome Moral there would be the pernicious Instruction, viz. That a Man may persevere in good Actions, and not be Rewarded for it thro' the whole extent of his Duration, that is neither in this World nor in the World to come."[31]

This conception of poetic justice, when brought into union with his ideas of the functions of the different types of literature, affected in an interesting manner his notions of the kinds of characters proper for the drama and for the epic. The relations of comedy and poetic justice caused him but little perplexity, for he believed that the exposure on the stage of such characters as are fitted for comedy brought with it a laughter that satisfied the demands of retribution.[32] In the

[29] *Original Letters*, p. 414.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 413.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[32] "Humour in Comedy is nothing but a little ridiculous Passion and the exposure of it in Comedy is thought to be Poetic Justice sufficient for it. Comic characters are to be punish'd, but punishment is to be wrapp'd up in the ridiculum." *Large Account of Taste.*

case of the relations of tragedy and poetic justice, however, the answer was not so simple; and Dennis's long letter of reply to Addison's attack upon the theory in the fortieth *Spectator* is devoted mainly to showing how an observance of this principle is necessary in tragedy for arousing the proper emotions, namely, terror and pity. In support of his contention that an unhappy ending of a tragedy is in harmony with this principle of poetic retribution, Dennis cited[83] Aristotle's discussion of the tragic fault, showing that the heroes in that species of drama must be neither absolutely blameless nor entirely bad, for in either case they would be incapable of exciting the passions proper to tragedy. Rather must they be "Persons who having neglected their Passions, suffer them to grow outrageous, and to hurry them to actions which they would otherwise abhor."[84] "With Aristotle, too, he recognized the possibility of tragedies with happy endings, a class of plays in which the distribution of justice became a comparatively easy matter; for though Dennis nowhere states how the heroes in such dramas are to atone for their faults and meet the demands of poetic justice, his probable answer may be inferred from his discussion of retribution in the epic,[85] in which species he believed that the ending must inevitably be happy. Though the great central character of the epic be morally imperfect, so his argument runs,[86] it is almost universally true that epic heroes are men of great public virtue, so great as to make "compensation for all Faults but Crimes, and he who has this public Virtue is not capable of Crimes." Dennis further urged that the epic heroes are almost invariably represented as carrying on some great design for the betterment of society, and that their heroic deeds are the source of that admiration which is the only emotion proper for an epic. To represent an epic hero as meeting an unhappy end would arouse terror or pity rather than admiration. Furthermore, the success of the hero not only excites admiration in the hearers or readers, but it also serves a patriotic purpose, since it "kindles every one of them

[83] *Original Letters*, p. 10.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 415.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 414.
[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 1 ff.

with a Love of his Country, and with a burning Zeal to imitate what he admires."[87]

These different arguments of Dennis's in favor of poetic justice which we have just been discussing, were shaped to some slight extent by his patriotic tendencies, still more by his religious ones, and perhaps most of all by his rationalism. Beneath all these arguments for poetic justice, we may note in a word, lies his belief that poetry instructs through examples, and that to make these examples effective the poet must distribute justice omnisciently. Furthermore, rational criticism, as we have previously noticed, demanded that the poet should reproduce in letters the order which contemporary science was discovering in the world about; and Dennis, along with most of the critics of his day, attempted to apply this doctrine of poetic justice, thinking thereby to establish a rationalized and perfect moral order in the domain of letters.

Dennis's best known defense of poetic justice is his reply to the fortieth *Spectator,* in which Addison had declared that the theory was "without Foundation in Nature, in Reason, or in the practice of the Ancients." Dennis's reply, with its defense and explanation of the doctrine, has been largely reproduced in the preceding discussion. Again, Dennis's regret at Shakspere's failure to observe poetic justice in *Coriolanus* led him to change the ending of that play. In his alteration both Coriolanus and Titus Aufidius perish, and the tribunes are represented as being driven toward the Tarpeian rock. His last notable utterance on this subject came in his letter to Sir Richard Blackmore, *On the Moral and Conclusion of an Epic Poem,* which he afterwards printed as the first of the *Original Letters.* Here it was that he discussed at length his belief that the epic hero must "meet a prosperous End." Today we smile at this quaint doctrine, which is frequently associated with the name of our author, but we must not forget that fifty years later this same belief found a champion in no less a critic than Dr. Johnson. Some other questions regarding the nature of

[87] Compare Gildon's statement in his preface to *Phaethon,* that poetic justice "establishes a just notion of Providence in its most important Action, the Government of Mankind."

character, especially in the epic, interested Dennis; but in the main they were of very slight importance, so we may well turn to a consideration of his attitude toward another of the great types—tragedy.

With regard to the neo-classical question as to which should be regarded as the greatest of the types,[38] Dennis was at variance with Rapin, Dryden, Mulgrave, and Gildon, who had declared for the epic.[39] Tragedy, Dennis considered, is more pleasing and instructive than the epic; and he further maintained that with comedy it furnishes the only legitimate entertainment of the stage.[40] As for the structure of tragedy, Dennis accepted the rules for the formation of plot and characters already noted in connection with the epic. Like Rapin[41] he emphasized the importance of action in the plot, declaring[42] that through action alone can the spectator be interested and pleased and so instructed. He likewise maintained[43] that it is perfectly proper for the dramatist to represent vicious characters and to place low and vulgar sentiments in their mouths, but that such is to be done only to expose them finally to ridicule.

Of the two great types of the drama Dennis considered tragedy as more pleasing and instructive than comedy, because it moves the greater emotions.[44] It is also greater in that it represents the things that are enduring, "the violent passions which are the same in all ages;"[45] while comedy is largely

[38] "The world is not agreed which is the nobler poem: *Plato* and *Bossu* prefer the former [the epic]; *Aristotle* and *Dacier* declare for Tragedy." *Epist. Ded.* to Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*, p. 2.

[39] Dennis's *Works*, II, 424.

[40] Letter to George Doddington, prefatory to the *Stage Defended*, 1726. So valuable to the established government did Dennis believe these dramatic entertainments, by bringing men together and pleasing them when they were assembled, that he here suggested that the ministry should bestow two annual prizes of £200 each, the one for comedy and the other for tragedy, "to be given besides the ordinary profits of the theatre, to him who shall perform best in each of them, which is to be decided by Judges appointed on purpose, and sworn to decide impartially."

[41] Rymer's translation of Rapin's *Reflections*, p. 115.

[42] *Large Account of Taste*, prefatory to the *Comical Gallant*.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Works*, II, 422. Cf. *Advancement and Reformation*, p. 55.

[45] *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, p. 18.

confined, he believed with Molière, to portraying contemporary manners and foibles. In tragedy the plot or fable is of much more importance than in comedy; in fact, Dennis insisted, it is of supreme moment,[46] for through it tragedy inculcates the lesson of its basic moral idea. In explaining the manner in which tragedy teaches its lessons through presenting moral ideas which arouse pity and terror, Dennis accepted the views of Dacier, who, he said,[47] "has given a very sensible account:

"For as the Humours in some distempered body are rais'd in order to the evacuating of that which is repugnant or peccant in them; so Tragedy excites Compassion and Terror to the same end: For the Play being over, the audience becomes serene again and is less likely to be mov'd by the common accidents of life, after it has seen the deplorable Calamities of Heroes and Sovereign Princes."

Though Dennis believed that an unfortunate ending of a tragedy is more likely to arouse terror and compassion than a happy one, still he acknowledged the legitimacy of the latter[48] and took Steele to task for failing to distinguish between the nature of this type of play and that of comedy. Dennis also recognized a distinction between serious plays with a happy ending and tragi-comedy. In discussing Addison's condemnation of the latter form he stated[49] that perhaps he no more approves of it than does the "Spectator," but that several of the plays held up for admiration by that writer are really tragi-comedies. And he adds that the "Spectator" is "vilely mistaken if he thinks Tragi-Comedy is the Growth of our English Theatres."

Another matter of interest in connection with Dennis's conceptions of tragedy is his attitude toward the tendency of his times to include romantic love among the passions proper for this form of drama. Against this extension Rapin took a stand in his commentaries upon Aristotle; and his views were supported by his translator, Rymer. Among the other critics

[46] Cf. Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 4.

[47] *Impartial Critick*, in Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, III, 184.

[48] *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, p. 17.

[49] *Original Letters*, p. 419. Cf. Hedelin, *Whole Art of the Stage*, London, 1684, II, 145–146.

of the time St. Évremond was the most violent opponent to the use of love as the chief emotion in tragedy. The question long remained among the mooted points of criticism, and in the second quarter of the eighteenth century Voltaire, Thomson, and others took it up. Dennis's earlier views are in favor of the extension. To him Gildon directed his *Vindication of Love in Tragedies;*[50] and in the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* 1696, our critic stated his position thus:

"love, of all passions, is the one whose excess we most willingly own: And therefore Mr. Rymer, who would have banished it from the English stage, would deprive our Poets of the secret means of going to the Heart of the Audience. For upon reflection we shall certainly find that the Characters in our Tragedies, which melt us most, are those whose Misfortunes are brought about by the extraordinary Force of Love."

Dennis early recognized,[51] however, that the love motive would have been unsuited to the Greek drama; and the influence upon him of St. Évremond, particularly noticeable in the last decade of the seventeenth century, reenforced both by his ardent desire to direct the drama to patriotic ends and by his growing aversion to rhyme,[52] may well be considered responsible for a change in his attitude. In the *Large Account of Taste,* 1702, Dennis took the position that love is not a very elevated or noble motive in a drama, and that its frequent representation on the stage may become dangerous to the public. Humor,[53] he affirmed,[54] gives a greater body to comedy than does love, for it comprises many passions of which love is but one; and in confirmation of his assertion he cited the plays of Molière, which contain but little love making. In his opposition to what he considered an overemphasis of love on the stage, however, Dennis did not banish the motive entirely from his own plays, for he felt that would shock the audience; but he repre-

[50] In his *Letters and Essays on Several Subjects,* 1694.

[51] Prefatory Letter to the *Impartial Critick,* 1693.

[52] "it [rhyme] has something effeminating in its jingling Nature, and emasculates our English Verse, and consequently is unfit for the Greater Poetry. English Tragedies that have been writ in Rime, most of them rowl upon Love." Preface to *Britannia Triumphans,* 1704.

[53] For a discussion of Dennis's use of the term see *infra,* p. 171.

[54] Cf. St. Évremond's *Oeuvres Meslées,* Paris, 1689, p. 565.

sented it as contending with other passions, such as friendship and duty, and conquered by them. But his opposition to love as a dramatic motive was tempered by his feeling that the passion might be used for reclaiming the audience from things more offensive; and in his last years he stated his belief[55] that "if love was represented as constrained, or punished when unlawful, it could bring no ill consequence."

Dennis's conceptions of comedy, the other great type of drama, were in the main the current neo-classical ones, founded on the precepts and practice of Jonson and strengthened by those of the French dramatists. The great disorders, he maintained,[56] are caused by the great passions and are to be punished by tragedy;[57] while the little disquietudes, the follies, not the crimes, should fall to comedy. The distinguishing characteristic of this form of drama, he went on, is the *ridiculum*, which he interpreted with his time as "laughter mixed with contempt and disapprobation."[58] While the *ridiculum* should mark the fable of a comedy, as Wycherley had employed it,[59] most writers have used it to best advantage in their characters. With the sentimental comedy, such as Steele's, Dennis had, as might be imagined, but little patience, and he denied flatly the name of comedy to these plays, save as the passions represented tended to excite ridicule.[60] He also maintained that every true comedy, like every true tragedy is a fable, and that its characters are universal and allegorical, a view which he supported by the authority of Molière.[61] Following Jonson, Dennis declared that to please and thus to instruct the public the comic poet must draw his characters from contemporary life and again he confirmed his position by citing the authority of Molière.[62] Unlike many of his con-

[55] *Stage Defended*, pp. 20–21.

[56] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 56.

[57] Cf. Corneille's *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1862, II, 222.

[58] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 289.

[59] *Miscellaneous Tracts*, p. 324.

[60] *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, pp. 18, 19.

[61] *La Critique de l'École des Femmes*. Cf. the preface to Dryden's *Evening's Love*, Ker, I, 137.

[62] As an evidence of Molière's popularity in England in Dennis's time may be cited the inclusion of his life and plays by Jacob in the *Poetical*

temporaries Dennis did not hold that comedy must concern itself exclusively with the lower classes of society. In his *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers* and elsewhere he takes the ground that comedy will draw its characters for the most part from common life, since the people in that class possess less self suppression and show their different humors more plainly, but that those of higher stations may well be used to give variety to the play. Furthermore, a lord may stand in as much need of correction as does his humbler brother, and "a Lord can be corrected nowhere but on the Stage."[63]

As for humor, one of the chief characteristics of comedy, Dennis was much interested in considering its nature[64] and defined it as "a subordinate passion expressed in a peculiar manner." Thus, for example, the passion of love in its lesser intensity and exaggerated expression becomes a humor.

Register, or the Lives and Characters of All the English Poets, 1719. In defending this inclusion Jacob says: "All the comedies of Monsieur Molière being now translated and deservedly esteem'd, I think it not improper in this place to give the Reader some Account of the Author and his Writings" (I, 292). In the account of Molière Jacob includes a list of his plays with the principal imitations or adaptations of them in England. This list contains the names of many distinguished dramatists, including Dryden, Congreve, Wycherley, Cibber, and Steele. St. Evremond had been partly responsible for this popularity of Molière and for the commonly accepted view that this dramatist "possessed the true spirit of comedy" (St. Évremond, *Oeuvres Meslées,* Paris, 1689, p. 563). Dennis accepted this view of Molière, with whose works he gained a very thorough acquaintance. His judgment of this dramatist is well represented by his criticism of Cibber's *Non-juror,* an adaptation of *Tartuffe:* "I soon found that there was little in the English Comedy of the *Beauties* of *Molière.* For *Molière's* Characters in his *Tartuffe* are Masterpieces, mark'd, distinguish'd, glowing, bold, touch'd with a fine yet daring Hand; all of them stamp'd with a double Stamp, the one from Art and the other from Nature: No Phantoms but Real Persons, such as Nature produces in all Ages, and Custom fashions in ours. His Dialogue, too, is lively, graceful, easie, strong, adapted to the Occasion, adapted to the Characters. In short, 'tis by this Comedy and by the Misanthrope that Molière perhaps has born away the prize of Comedy from all Persons in all Ages, except Ben Jonson alone." *Original Letters,* p. 141.

[63] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 56.

[64] See his *Large Account of Taste,* on which the above paragraph is based.

Humor he considered far better for comedy than wit, because it is the outgrowth of character, while wit is an excrescence of character or fitted to it by force. "Wit," he maintained, "is the effect of the Fancy, and Humour the work of the Imagination." Furthermore, humor gives a body to the play, both through increasing the robustness of the *dramatis personae* and by demanding greater action than does wit in the representation.

In his attitude toward many of the questions concerning the structure of comedy and tragedy Dennis took a much more liberal view than did many of his contemporaries. The unities, for example, never became with him laws inviolable; but rather, as with Dryden, they were lesser beauties which might be set aside for attaining those greater. In glancing briefly at the history of the unities in England it is interesting to note that they had been introduced by Sidney,[65] but that they had failed to receive any close application till nearly seventy-five years later.[66] Jonson, who contended less strongly for the unities than did Sidney, laid greatest emphasis upon that of action. In the prologue to *Volpone,* however, he declared that he had observed the laws of time, place, and persons.[67] By many of the critics at the close of the seventeenth century Corneille was held responsible as the rule maker,[68] and this conception was frequently restated down to the time of Dr. Johnson. Dryden, who was a fairly close student of Corneille, stood against any servile observance of the unities, which he called "the mechanic beauties." From him the name and conception passed on to Dennis.[69] In opposing the unity of place Dryden declared[70] that the "imagination of the audience aided by the words and the painted scenes, may suppose the

[65] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance,* p. 90; p. 291.

[66] *Ibid.,* p. 291.

[67] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 292.

[68] *Supra,* p. 116 n. Also Johnson's Preface to his Edition of Shakespeare, 1765, xxv.

[69] Ker, I, 212 and Note. Cf. Rapin's *Reflections,* pt. 1, sce. 21, and *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* II, 345.

[70] *Works,* XV, 297.

stage . . . to be sometimes one place and sometimes another." Nor did he consider it essential to maintain a single plot throughout a play, since the English "love variety more than any other nation, and will not be pleased without it."[71]

Practically all these views of Dryden's descended to Dennis, whose first protest against a strict observance of the unities appeared in the third dialogue of the *Impartial Critick,* 1693, where he condemned the practice of Racine. In his own plays, however, Dennis sailed so close to the shore of conformity that his "performances" were frequently characterized as "perfectly regular." Possibly the example and influence of Congreve, who was regarded very highly by Dennis during the closing years of the seventeenth century, may have held him more closely to an observance of the rules; but whatever may have been the cause, Dennis rather plumed himself on the manner in which he had observed the unities in *A Plot and No Plot,*[72] 1697, which, he asserted, "is perhaps the most regular of our low comedies." Of *Rinaldo and Armida* he stated that the action is decent, that it observes the unities, and that with the exception of the machines it is reasonable. In the former play, however, he defended his breach of the unity of place and declared that regularity without diversion counts for little.

But Dennis's best known utterances regarding the unities are those in his *Remarks upon Cato,* which have brought him the approval of critics from Johnson to Lowell. In discussing Addison's adherence to the unities of time and place in that popular play, Dennis declared[73] that these "are Mechanic Rules, which if they are observed with Judgment, strengthen the Reasonableness of the Incidents, heighten the probability of the Action, promote the agreeable Deceit of the Representation, and add Clearness, Grace, and Comliness to it. But if they are practiced without discretion, they render the action more improbable, and the representation more absurd." Dennis then proceeded to show how the strict observance in Addison's *Cato* of the unities of time and place ridiculously crowded love-

[71] Dedication to *Tyrannic Love.*

[72] Preface.

[73] p. 35.

making and treason upon each other and forced the conspirators to form their plans against Cato in his own great public hall.[74] The love-making of the children on the day big with their father's fate, Dennis contended,[75] destroys the unity of action, which he regarded as a much more serious fault than the breach of the other two.

Much the same attitude is manifested in Dennis's criticism of Shakspere. Though he objected to Shakspere's "duplicity or triplicity of plot," he justified by common sense the Elizabethan's violation of the unity of time. Furthermore, while he disapproved such changes of place as that in *Othello,* "which begins in Europe and ends in Asia," he was much more severe with those plays "in which the Unity of Place is preserved, sometimes by whimsical comic Absurdities, and sometimes by dreadful and prodigious Extravagancies."[76] In his later utterances Dennis agreed with Gildon that the unity of action is essential, and that the others are not. This position was the result of his general attitude toward the construction of a play: a single moral idea at the basis of a play demanded that the action should be single.

Against the attempt to restore to the drama the chorus of the Greeks, which was urged as tending to confirm the observance of the unity of place, Dennis uttered, as has been noticed, a sharp protest. Aristotle had maintained that the chorus "should be an integral part of the whole" and should share in the action. Late in the seventeenth century Racine took up the idea and used a chorus in several of his plays. Dacier, in his remarks on Aristotle, advocated its adoption; and led largely by his authority, Rymer introduced a chorus into his drama, *Edgar,* and defended the practice in his *Short View of Tragedy,* 1693, declaring that the chorus is the basis of all verisimilitude in tragedy. He further maintained that the chorus is necessary to mark the intervals of the acts and to preserve the unity of place, which is destroyed by playing the violins between the

[74] Professor Ker has noticed (I, xlix) that Dennis's arguments against the strict observance of the unity of place are practically a repetition of those of Neander in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy.*

[75] p. 12.

[76] *Original Letters,* pp. 73 ff.

acts. Though Milton's influence had been cast in favor of this innovation, Dennis strongly opposed such a step. He declared[77] that the chorus was effective among the Greeks "because it was adapted to the Religion and the Temper of the People . . . but we have nothing in our Religion and Manners by which we are able to defend it . . . it ought certainly to be banished from our Stage." Dennis proceeded to show that Racine had restored the chorus because he had written for a house of women to act, that the chorus is not necessary for the imitation which Aristotle had declared the great characteristic of tragedy, that its use led to absurdities, and that it is as unreasonable for a king to leave the stage for the chorus to entertain the audience as for him to make way for the violins.

"'Tis not the tagging of the act with a chorus," he declared, "that makes a Tragedy one body, but the Unity of the Action; and for my part I cannot conceive but that the parts are sufficiently united when they have a beginning, middle, and end, which have a mutual, necessary and immediate connection."

In his classification of the greater poetry Dennis included one other type, the ode, or as he more frequently called it, "the Pindarick." His interest in this sort of verse was doubtless fostered by his theory of the relation of religion and poetry, and in all probability the theory, in its turn, furthered his liking for the ode. For the neo-classicists this was the form in which poetry might rise from the earth. Mulgrave went so far as to declare that in the ode judgment yields and fancy governs; but Dennis rather held with Boileau that "Chez elle un beau désordre est un effet de l'art"[78]—that there is a certain regularity in the wildness, and that the disorders are studied. In the preface to the *Court of Death,* 1695, which contains his longest discussion of the nature of the ode, Dennis quotes at length "the famous Rapin," with whom he agrees that "the Ode ought to have as much boldness, elevation, and majesty as Epic poetry itself; but then it is certain (because of its brevity) that it ought to have more vehemence, more transport, more enthusiasm." Pindar's digressions,

[77] Prefatory letter to the *Impartial Critick.* See also Dryden's *Works,* XVII, 324.

[78] *Art Poétique,* II, 72.

Dennis further affirmed, are studied and really orderly, and his language is so bold that the English tongue is not capable of imitating some of his figures. With Congreve[79] Dennis asserted that some of Cowley's odes show a reprehensible irregularity of form; though our critic never distinguished between the "true" and the Cowleyan Pindaric, and in his own writings employed the latter form. These ideas of the ode did not differ very materially from the commonly accepted theory of the time;[80] it was only when Dennis attempted to put his beliefs into practice that he drew upon himself, as he acknowledged,[81] charges of "horrible extravagances."

For any lyric short of the ode Dennis manifested the usual neo-classical indifference. Indeed he went so far in his later years as to declare it questionable whether "anything but great and exalted poetry is properly poetry." In his earlier days, however, as a man of the town, he evinced a considerable interest in satire and burlesque, which he never quite lost. About the time of Dennis's greatest attention to satire, Dryden was translating Juvenal, and the two critics probably discussed together the nature of that genre. In his translation, however, Dryden gave no great consideration to the characteristics of the type, declaring himself satisfied "to discover some of the hidden beauties in the design of the ancients." With Dacier[82] Dryden maintained that the chief aim of satire should be to instruct, a belief which was commonly repeated, as by Blackmore and Shaftsbury. Dennis asserted[83] that the great purpose of satire is "the unmasking of hypocrites," and he did not hesitate to affirm that to accomplish this end the poet might enter into the concerns of private life. He disapproved[84] of

[79] *Works of William Congreve,* 1761, III, 435.

[80] Cf. Boileau, *Oeuvres,* Paris, 1819, II, 74. One passage, however, in the preface to the *Court of Death* represents Dennis's more enthusiastic judgment: "Pindar, rais'd by the influence of divine, even above his own exalted genius; grows vehement, swells, and ferments with fury, then precipitately flows with a mighty sound, and knows no bounds to his impetuous course."

[81] Preface to the *Court of Death.*

[82] Saintsbury's *History of Criticism,* II, 385.

[83] *Theatre,* II, 448.

[84] *Original Letters,* p. 430.

Dryden's preference of Juvenal to Horace, declaring that as the former's satire partook of the nature of tragedy, and the latter's of that of comedy, they are so different as to render comparison impossible. Elsewhere he maintained[85] that Horace is characterized by pleasantry and Juvenal by force, and that Boileau had combined these qualities so admirably that he had surpassed both of the Romans.

To the consideration of burlesque, which he regarded as a kind of satire, Dennis devoted a part of the preface to the *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose,* 1693. Through the influence of Scarron in France and of Butler in England that form monopolized for a time the attention of the two nations. Dennis's admiration for *Hudibras* led him to maintain against the authority of Boileau and of Dryden that Butler's burlesque was worthy of a gentleman's pen, because it used extravagance only "to give Reason the more luster," and that it had been written with a just design. Against Dryden's contention that the verse of *Hudibras* is too cramping, Dennis cited his master's own defense of the octosyllabic for the Pindaric and declared that though the meter is suited to exalted poetry, it is much better adapted to the humbler burlesque. Dennis also defended the double and treble rhymes to which Dryden objected and affirmed that they were "as peculiarly becoming to a Jest, as a rougish Leer, or a comical tone of Voice."[86] Burlesque, however, received its death blow from Boileau's condemnation of the form, and with the first quarter of the eighteenth century it gave way to the mock heroic. Dennis's growing literalmindedness clashed with the nature of this new form; and he violently, though not very successfully, opposed it in his *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock,* 1729.

One other poetical genre remains to be discussed, the ballad,

[85] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* p. 57.

[86] "To Latinize a pun, we must seek a pun in Latin that will answer to it; and to give an idea of the double endings of Hudibras, we must have recourse to a similar practice in the old monkish doggerel. Dennis, the fiercest oppunger of puns in ancient or modern times, professed himself highly tickled with the "a stick" chiming to "ecclesiastic." Yet what was this but a specimen of pun, a verbal consonance." Lamb's *Popular Fallicies, Works,* Ainger ed., III, 353.

which we may insist upon calling a literary type, even if Dennis would have denied it the honor. His single utterance concerning the ballad appears in his letter to Henry Cromwell, which in its published form[87] bears the heading *Of Simplicity in Poetical Composition, in Remarks on the 70th Spectator.* Though this reply to Addison was written when Dennis was quarreling with the "Spectator," it stands in thorough agreement with the critic's general conception of the nature of poetry. Starting from his customary thesis that poetry is a means of exciting passion, Dennis declared that it accomplishes its end through the use of figurative language and of harmony, and that these qualities are lacking in *Chevy Chase,* which Addison had praised. To prove figurative language essential to passion, Dennis adduced the authority of Horace, Rapin, and Boileau; and to show the utter lack of harmony in this particular ballad, he compared in Rymer-like fashion some of its passages with others from Vergil, dealing with similar subjects. In so doing he quite forgot what he himself had said about the impossibility of comparing works different in their natures. To Addison's argument for the ballads as pleasing all classes of people, Dennis retorted that the rabble might judge things debased, but that whoever would give sentence upon human nature exalted, must have education.

Certain other classes, or types, Dennis mentioned incidentally. He praised Ambrose Philips for excelling all contemporaries in writing pastorals, though he never discussed the nature of that type. At times, too, Dennis seems to have caught the idea that the novel[88] might be capable of something of that art which he ordinarily conceived as characteristic of certain classes of poetry only. Once he went so far as to consider and even to outline a discussion of the letter as a literary type, stating in the preface to his *Letters upon Several Occasions,* 1696:

[87] *Original Letters,* p. 166.

[88] In his *Remarks upon Cato,* p. 16, Dennis states: "There is not with all its Improbability in this Tragedy any of that Art and Contrivance, which is to be found in an entertaining Romance or an agreeable Novel; that Art and Contrivance by which their Authors excite our Curiosity, and cause those eager longings in their Readers to know the events of things."

"I design d in the first place to have said something of the Nature and of the end of a Letter, and thought to have prov'd that the Invention of it was to supply Conversation, and not to imitate it, for that nothing but the Dialogue was capable of doing that; from whence I have drawn this Conclusion, that the Style of a Letter was neither to come quite up to that of Conversation, nor yet to keep at too great a distance from it. After that I determin'd to shew that all Conversation is not familiar; that it may be Ceremonious, that it may be Grave, nay, that it may be Sublime, or that Tragedy must be allow'd to be out of Nature: that if the Sublime were easy and unconstrain'd, it might be as consistent with the Epistolary Style, as it was with the Didactique, that Voiture had admirably join'd in with one of them, and Longinus with both. After this, I resolv'd to have said something of those who had most succeeded in Letters amongst the Ancients and Moderns, and to have treated of their Excellencies and their Defects: to have spoken more particularly of Cicero and Pliny amongst the Ancients, and amongst the Moderns of Balzac and Voiture; to have shown that Cicero is too simple, and too dry, and that Pliny is too affected, and too refined, that one of them has too much Art in him, and that both of them have too little of Nature. That the elevation of Balzac was frequently forc'd and his Sublime affected; that his Thoughts were often above his Subject, and his expression almost always above his Thoughts; and that whatsoever his Subjects were, his Style was seldom alter'd; that Voiture was easy and unconstrain'd, and natural when he was most exalted, that he seldom endeavour'd to be witty at the expence of right Reason; but that his Thoughts were for the most part true and just, his Expression was often defective, and that his Style was too little diversify'd. That for my own part, as I came infinitely short of the extraordinary Qualities of these great Men, I thought myself oblig'd to endeavour the rather to avoid their Faults; and that consequently I had taken all the care that I could, not to think out of Nature and good Sense, and neither to force nor neglect my Expression; and that I had always taken care to suit my Style to my Subject, whether it was Familiar or Sublime, or Didactique; and that I had more or less varied it in every Letter."

We may well regret that Dennis never undertook this proposed consideration of the nature of the letter; for we cannot help feeling from the outline just suggested that in examining this type, unfettered by neo-classical rules, his naturally acute critical sense would have produced a discussion worthy to rank with his other pioneer criticisms. As it was, he was satisfied to confine himself largely to the commonly accepted types, especially to the epic and the drama, where his respect for authority and tradition came more and more to stifle his independent critical thinking. Through all his later observations on

these different literary genres may be traced his esteem for the type, and his insistence that each poem should conform to the ends proper to that particular kind and should excite the emotion characteristic of its own particular species.

VIII

Style and Versification

Dennis's chance remarks upon style, which we may now consider, resemble his more extended discussion of the types in that they are largely in agreement with the current demands for decency and decorum. Concerning prose style he had little to say beyond his statements just quoted regarding the nature of the letter, and his further assertions that the writer must adapt his manner to suit the person addressed, and that didactic prose should be "pure, succinct, unaffected, and grave."[1] This same attitude, but slightly altered to fit his conceptions of verse, is evident in his demands that poetry be "clear, pure, easy, strong, noble, pathetic, and harmonious."[2] The first requisite for securing these qualities is lofty ideals, which he endeavored to prove are best supplied by religious subjects. Among the devices for affecting and arousing the reader, Dennis set a great value upon the writer's representing objects in motion. This conception was due, perhaps, to Rapin's insistence upon movement as contributing toward the exciting of passion,[3] reenforced by Hobbes's emphasis of the mutation of ideas as entirely the result of motion in them.[4] To illustrate his point Dennis compared Sternhold's translation of one of the *Psalms* with a translation of the same by Milton; and he asserted that the difference between the two versions arose in great measure from the greater animation, or the greater motion, evident in Milton.

In maintaining that the language of poetry should be figurative, Dennis was, of course, simply following an Aristotelian precept which found a very general acceptance near the close

[1] *Impartial Critick*, in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, III, 157.
[2] Preface to his *Remarks on Prince Arthur*.
[3] *Oeuvres*, 1709, II, 73.
[4] *Works*, London, 1740, I, 390.

of the seventeenth century.[5] "Great passions," Dennis maintained,[6] "naturally throw [the writer] upon Figurative Language, as they must of necessity do any Poet as long as he continues Master of them." He asserted,[7] however, that figurative language is not the natural expression of the deepest stages of grief, since "to be capable of making Similitudes, it [the mind] must be serene."[8] He also recognized that the figures agreeable to one nation and language may not be fitting to another, that English, for example, is incapable of some of the daring figures of Pindar. Moreover, he repeatedly took the position that such figures as point, conceit, and wit are mental rather than emotional and form no part of true poetry; and he stoutly contended[9] that they had debauched and ruined the writings of such poets as Denham and Waller.

As passion formed Dennis's standard in testing figurative language in poetry, so harmony was his great criterion in judging versification. Such an attitude soon brought him into clash with the tendencies of the time, for in that period when the heroic couplet was nearly supreme, he stood as the great champion of unrhymed verse. His position was, of course, in good measure the result of his admiration, or better veneration, for Milton's practice, reenforced by such critical utterances as that of the poet in his condemnation[10] of rhyme as the inven-

[5] *E.g.*, Collier's *Defense of the Short View*, p. 38.

[6] *Works*, II, 466.

[7] Preface to the *Passion of Byblis*, 1692.

[8] Cf. Rymer's statement in his *Tragedies of the Last Age:* "Naturally in a great Passion, none have leisure to ramble for Comparisons."

[9] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 17. This matter of the use of figurative language formed a favorite subject of eighteenth century critical debate. Thomson, for example, was against figures in tragedy. Mallet, Hill, Voltaire, and others also discussed the subject.

[10] Preface to *Paradise Lost*. The *Critical Specimen*, Anon., 1715, contains the following comment on Dennis's attitude toward rhyme: "He had never read in Milton or any of the Ancients that Pegasus wore bells, upon which he in a very great Rage tore the Bells from his Hobby horse—and he has rid him without bells ever since." This comparison of rhymes to bells on Pegasus had doubtless been impressed on the public mind by Andrew Marvell's lines *On Paradise Lost*, prefixed to the second edition of Milton's epic in 1674:

tion of a barbarous age, "trivial, and of no true musical delight." The theories of Dryden and of Roscommon, expressed, as Dennis puts it,[11] "before the beginning and at the end of the Essay on Translated Verse," also furnished support for his attitude, even though their practice generally agreed with the prevailing custom. Dryden's position is of especial interest, for as early as 1676,[12] he seems to have tired of the couplet and in his later years was in theory,[13] and to some extent in practice, the advocate of unrhymed verse.

How far Dennis was really indebted to Dryden for his theories of versification, is hard to determine. His early poem, the *Passion of Byblis,* 1692, and his *Miscellanies* are in rhyme,

> "Well mightst thou scorn thy readers to allure
> With tinkling rime, of thy own sense secure,
> While the Town-Bayes writes all the while and spells,
> And like a pack-horse tires without his bells."

With this may be compared some lines in Charles Goodall's *Propitiatory Sacrifice to the Ghost of J— M— by way of Pastoral,* published in 1689:

> "Daphnis! the great Reformer of our Isle!
> Daphnis! the patron of the Roman Stile!
> Who first to sence converted Doggerel Rhimes,
> The Muses Bells took off, and stopt their Chimes."

Through the closing years of the seventeenth century Milton's example made against the use of rhyme. Thus Samuel Woodford, in the preface to his *Paraphrase upon the Canticles,* 1679, states that, "In the next Age Even our now cry'd up Blank Verse will look as unfashionable, how well soever as a Novelty and upon his Credit who was the Inventor of it here may speed in this. Not but that I have, and always had, as great an honour for Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost* as those who admire him most." Again, William Wollaston, in his *Design of Part of the Book of Ecclesiastes,* 1691, says: "Had I been hardy enough like some others (which too late I wish) to have broken a barbarous custom and freed myself from the troublesome and modern bondage of Rhyming (as Milton calls it) the Business which now immediately follows, had been somewhat better than it is." Three years later, in answer to the question "Whether rhyme is essential to English Verse?" the *Athenian Mercury* replied, "No, certainly, for none will say Milton's *Paradise* is not Verse, tho' he has industriously, and in some places to a fault avoided Rhyme." The greater part of this note is a restatement of quotations cited in Mr. Havens's article on *Seventeenth Century Notices of Milton,* in *Englische Studien,* 1909, pp. 175 ff.

[11] Preface to the *Monument,* 1702.

[12] *Works,* XV, 360.

[13] *Works,* XIV, 211.

though he stated in the preface to the former that he was not "so miserably mistaken as to think it [rhyme] necessary for Poetry." "If rhyming is ever necessary to so strong and masculine a language as ours," he went on, "it must be on these tender subjects,"[14] *i. e.*, the story of Byblis. After these first efforts Dennis practically abandoned the use of the couplet and persistently employed the unrhymed forms, though recognizing, as he wrote Steele in 1720, that "the harmony without rime" had made some of his poems "less pleasing for the time to about a half of [his] readers." In the preface to his poem on the death of Queen Anne he first undertook a formal consideration of the subject of versification.[14a] In this discussion to which he seems to have devoted much thought and care, he pointed out the restrictions under which rhyme places the writer, that it demands that the sense frequently be bent to meet the needs of the verse, that it conceals the want of a fine ear, much as the droning of a bagpipe conceals the imperfections of the notes, and that it keeps a poor writer jogging on in dullness. He blamed rhyme chiefly, however, as the foe of harmony and in his accusation advanced what he considered some entirely new arguments:

"There are in our *English* poets four things which have been thought to enduce to Harmony; which are Number, Measure, Cadence, and Rime. Of these the first three consist of several different Sounds which are dependent upon one another. Rime is wholly independent of the other three; and consists in the greater Poetry of but two sounds, which are Unisons. Now I appeal to all Masters of Music if Unisons can make any Harmony. Harmony is the agreement of different Sounds, and the Perfection of Harmony is the agreement of discordant Sounds by the Mediation of others. And there is a great deal of Chromatic Harmony in Poetry

[14] Possibly Dennis's aversion to rhyme was strengthened by Rymer's objection to its use in tragedy, as stated in the "Advertisement" to his *Edgar:* "I doubted, indeed, whether Rhyme was proper for Tragedy. Not that I thought it unnatural; for questionless 'tis more natural to speak in Rhyme, than to speak English: this we owe to the Nurse, the former to the Poet. Nor can this be said to be unnatural, where Nature is help'd and improv'd. But Rhyme is rather sweet than grave; unless tempered with so much Thought and with such Pomp of Words as suits not with that Sorrow and Lamentation which Tragedy ordinarily requires."

[14a] Dennis restated many of the ideas of this preface in his *Short Essay toward an English Prosody,* which first appeared in the 1722 edition of James Greenwood's An *Essay towards a Practical English Grammar.*

as well as in Music. And such particularly is a great deal of Virgil's Harmony. Well then! Rime consisting of Unisons can have no Harmony in itself, and being independent of Numbers, Cadence, and Measure can never promote the Harmony which they produce. And a Poet's constant Application to Rime diverts his Application, in a good Degree, from Numbers, Measures, and Cadence, and consequently is a severe restraint upon the three Producers of Harmony. And as it diverts the Application of the Writer, so by alluring the Attention of Vulgar Readers, it diverts these from the other three."

At the conclusion of his discussion Dennis prophesied that before the middle of the century rhyme would be banished from English poetry.

In judging the versification of the great English poets Dennis showed considerable independence. True, he accepted the current opinion that Chaucer had been handicapped by "the rudeness of his language, or want of Ear, or want of Experience, or perhaps a just Mixture of all,"[15] and that consequently Dryden's revisions had been an improvement. But he recognized in Shakespere "the very original of our English Tragical Harmony; that is, the Harmony of Blank Verse, diversified often by Dissyllable and Trisyllable Termination. For that Diversity distinguishes it from Heroic Harmony, and bringing it nearer to common Use, makes it more proper to gain Attention, and more fit for Action and Dialogue. Such verses we make when we are writing Prose; we make such verses in Common Conversation."[16]

In his earlier years Dennis manifested much admiration for Waller's verse, and he joined his contemporaries in declaring[17] this poet "the first who used our ears to the music of a just cadence." In his later years, however, he showed less and less respect for Waller, whom he came to consider the forerunner of Pope. Against Pope, as the great exponent of the heroic

[15] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 20.

[16] *Original Letters*, p. 373. Commenting on Dennis's statement, Johnson says in the Preface to his *Shakespeare*: "I know not whether this praise is rigorously just. The dyssyllable termination, which the critic rightly appropriates to the drama, is to be found though not in Gorboduc, which is confessedly before our author; yet in Hyeronymo, of which the date is not certain, but which there is reason to believe as old as his earliest plays."

[17] Prefatory Letter to the *Impartial Critick*, 1693.

couplet, Dennis directed his chief fulminations on that form of verse, all with a penetration that appeals strongly to those who have felt the couplet a "rocking horse" measure. In his first assault upon Pope, in the *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* Dennis declared[18] that the bard's numbers were without cadence and variety; and in some form or other he repeated this charge in each of his subsequent attacks. Thus, in the *Remarks on the Rape of the Lock* Dennis asserted[19] that Pope's Pegasus is "a battered Kentish Jade, that neither ambles, nor paces, nor trots, nor runs, but is always on the Canterbury; and as he never mends, never slackens his Pace, but when he stumbles or falls."

In a word, then, we may say that Dennis derived from Milton a love of blank verse, that in his day he stood almost as the sole champion of that form against the heroic couplet, that his theorizing concerning the nature of verse, while crude, was decidedly modern, and that, though sometimes prejudiced, his judgment of the versification of the great English poets shows a great deal of insight and critical acumen.

IX

His Judgments of English Writers

This same acuteness which characterizes many of Dennis's specific judgments of the versification of the English poets is to be found in his criticisms of their work as a whole. What Mr. Saintsbury has said about Dryden's specific judgments being better than his theory might also be applied to Dennis. Of Chaucer Dennis had little to say beyond the criticism of his verse cited above. Late in life the critic confessed that he had not read him for many years.[1] For Spenser, of whom he seems to have been a fairly close student,[2] his admiration was

[18] "The Reader may easily see that, through all the Verses I have cited, and 'tis true of all those I have not cited, instead of a pleasing Variety of Numbers, there is nothing but a perpetual Identity of Sound, an Eternal Monotony. The Trumpet of Homer, with its loud and its various Notes, is dwindled in Pope's lips to a Jews Trump" (p. 8).

[19] Preface. Cf. his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer,* p. 36.

[1] *Daily Journal,* May 11, 1728.

[2] *Works,* II, 453.

more profound, and his appreciation of him seems deeper and truer than that of Dryden. Dennis characterized the author of the *Faerie Queen* as "a powerful and unsurpassed genius" and placed it to the shame of England that he had been allowed to starve.[3]

On the whole it seems just to say that Dryden's appreciation of Shakspere was inferior to Dennis's. True, Dryden once stated that Shakspere "had a larger soul for poetry than any of our nation," but his general attitude is better represented by his more guarded praise and frequent strictures, as in the *Defense of the Epilogue*.[4] To the present writer it also seems plain that Dennis knew his Shakspere the better, and that he made more frequent and widely drawn references to him than did Dryden. Of what have been called the romantic comedies, our critic, in keeping with the tendencies of his age, had little to say. His veneration for Shakspere, for that is the term he frequently employs, best manifested itself in his appreciation of the tragedies. Shakspere had a good talent for comedy, Dennis declared, but he had a genius for tragedy.[5] Indeed he was one of the greatest writers of tragedy that the world had ever seen;[6] and had he possessed the art of Sophocles and Euripides, he would have far surpassed them. Great as was his admiration for the French dramatists, Dennis declared that there were "several things in Shakespear superior to anything" they had produced; and in spite of his staunch admiration for Dryden and his work, Dennis acknowledged that the

[3] *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer*, p. 5.

[4] "Shakespere, who many times has written better than any poet, in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes, in many places, below the dullest writer of ours, or any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such heights of thought to so low expressions as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets; he wears almost everywhere two faces; and you have scarcely begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other." Ker, I, 172.

[5] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 10. Cf. Dryden's *Works*, X, 412. Possibly Dennis took the idea from Dryden's suggestion. See Sherwood's *Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practice*, Boston, 1898, p. 31. Rymer, however, held that "Shakespear's genius lay for Comedy and Humour." *Short View of Tragedy*, p. 156.

[6] *Original Letters*, p. 371.

dramatic genius of his master was far inferior to that of the Elizabethan.

It was, however, for Shakspere's innate ability and its triumphs that the critic repeatedly expressed his veneration. Shakspere's limitations, Dennis believed, were chiefly those of his age and lay principally in his "duplicity and triplicity of plots," marring the unity of action. As for the dramatist's breaches of the unities of time and place, he recognized that they were necessary for attaining greater beauties. For his character drawing Dennis manifested the highest admiration; he praised its justness, exactness, and vividness, though he was occasionally displeased with the anachronisms. The sentiments, too, Dennis regarded as usually "noble, generous, easy, natural, and adapted to the persons using them."[7] Furthermore, in spite of the lapse of time, Shakspere's style was frequently "simple tho' elevated, graceful tho' bold, and easie tho' strong." Dennis criticized, however, the violation of poetic justice and declared[8] that the good and bad perish promiscuously in these plays. Especially did he condemn the ending of *Coriolanus,* which he "improved" to fit his own ideas. Against the moral of *Julius Caesar* he was also severe and suggested a better conclusion.[9]

Of greater interest, perhaps, are Dennis's conjectures as to Shakspere's classical attainments. In his third letter *On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear,* 1712, the critic shrewdly maintained that the dramatist had possessed no intimate knowledge of the classics, or he would have chosen to imitate Sophocles or Euripides rather than Plautus, whom he had probably read in translation.[10] Then too, if he had been a

[7] *Original Letters,* p. 373.

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 379.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 391.

[10] "Dennis's remarks upon Shakspeare, scattered through his writings, are well worth collecting and republishing, as affording a good insight into the opinions about Shakspeare current during what may be called the first critical period. I question, after all, if Dennis had not a higher appreciation of Shakspeare than Farmer. His arguments against Shakspeare's scholarship are far more subtle and delicate than Farmer's, and not nearly so offensive." C. Elliot Browne, *Notes and Queries,* 5th Series, Vol. I, 342.

classicist, he would have gone to Livy for the material for *Coriolanus*.[11] Dennis placed this ignorance, however, not to Shakspere's discredit but to his honor; for it only added to the glory of the achievement of this English author through the sheer force of his genius.

It is for his exaltation of this genius, his historical attitude in discussing some of the plays, and his genuine love of them, rather than for his revisions, that we would remember Dennis in connection with Shakspere. These latter performances show only too plainly the hand of the workman, who, as Dennis himself puts it, "judges well, but cannot himself perform." Falstaff and Coriolanus are woefully "translated" in their early eighteenth century garb and speech, though they fared, perhaps, not so badly as did other Shaksperian characters at the hands of Dennis's contemporaries. While these performances must, of course, weigh heavily in our final estimate of Dennis's appreciation of Shakspere, we must not forget that too often they have been given entire consideration, and that little or nothing has been said on the other side for the critic who in his "veneration for the memory of Shakespere" "loves and admires his Charms, and makes them one of his chief Delights, who sees and reads him over and over and over and still remains unsatiated, and who mentions his Faults for no other Reason but to make his Excellence the more conspicuous."[12]

Dennis ranked Shakspere's tragedies far above those by Jonson. In fact, though Dennis had a high respect for Jonson's critical learning, especially for his *Discoveries*, which he occasionally quoted,[13] he repeatedly declared that the great Ben had no right notion of tragedy, for he had often failed to move terror and pity and consequently had fallen far behind the ancients.[14] But along with Rymer and Dryden, with Gildon and Addison, and a host of other critics of the day, he was loud in his praise of Jonson's comedies. In common with these critics Dennis affirmed the belief that Jonson had carried away

[11] Johnson seems to have accepted and restated Dennis's arguments about Shakspere's learning. See the preface to his Shakespeare, xxxvii.

[12] *Original Letters*, p. 406.

[13] *E.g.*, Preface to his *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Homer.*

[14] *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 57.

the palm of comedy from both the ancients and the moderns and had done so in spite of his occasional stooping to play the buffoon.[15] St. Évremond was largely responsible for this praise of Jonson by the critics and in a measure for their attitude toward comedy—the exaltation of the *ridiculum,* which caused Dennis and his age to place Jonson's comedies far above Shakspere's.[16] According to our critic Jonson's work is distinguished by its humor and its plot management,[17] more especially by the former, which strengthened his observance of the *ridiculum.* Dennis criticized the *Volpone* and the *Alchemist,* which he ranked among the best of Jonson's comedies, on the ground that "the intrigue seems more dexterously perplexed than happily disentangled;"[18] but the management of the *Silent Woman* he considered so admirable that it should rank as the best English comedy.[19] Dennis shows for Jonson, however, little of the enthusiastic appreciation which he bestows upon Shakspere; and he criticizes Ben for failing to "arouse passion," to touch the heart.

More notable than Dennis's praise of either Jonson or Shakspere is his admiration for Milton; for he stood among his contemporaries as the great champion of the Puritan poet, anticipating by a dozen years much of the appreciation which has frequently been credited to the "Spectator." The various stages in the growth of Milton's popularity have recently been traced in an interesting manner by Mr. Raymond D. Havens.[20] This writer has pointed out how from the time immediately after Milton's death reference was made to him with increasing frequency by such writers as the poet's nephew Edward Phillips,[21] by Charles Goodall,[22] Samuel Woodford,[23] Oldham,[24]

[15] *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers,* p. 11.

[16] St. Évremond's *Oeuvres Meslées,* 1689, p. 578.

[17] Preface to *Gibraltar.*

[18] *Letters upon Several Occasions,* p. 76.

[19] *Theatre,* II, 376. *Cf.* Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy,* Ker, I, 83 ff.

[20] *Englische Studien,* 1909, p. 175; p. 199.

[21] *Phrasium Poeticarum Thesaurus,* quoted in the *Lives of Edward and John Phillips* by William Godwin, 1815, p. 145.

[22] *Propitiatory Sacrifice to the Ghost of J— M— by way of Pastoral,* pub. 1689.

[23] *Paraphrase upon the Canticles,* 1679.

[24] *Bion, a Pastoral,* 1680.

and a number of other writers of the period. Mr. Havens has also cited Rymer's[25] and Winstanley's[26] adverse criticism of Milton, and like Professor Spingarn has pointed out how the increasing admiration for Milton found expression in the various readings of two closing lines in Mulgrave's *Essay upon Poetry*.[27] In 1688 Tonson published the sumptuous edition of *Paradise Lost*, which with the encouragement of Lord Dorset had been warmly welcomed by the whigs. Moreover, Milton's epic strongly influenced such minor religious poems as those of Samuel Slater,[28] Henry Hare,[29] and William Wollaston;[30] and it is hardly necessary to add that the poem was greatly admired by non-conformists generally. Dryden's comparison of Milton with Vergil and Homer, which first appeared in Tonson's edition just mentioned, is well known. Dennis declared,[31] however, that this epigram was merely a paraphrase of one by the Italian poet Selvaggi:

> "Graecia Maeonidem, jactet sibi Roma Maronem,
> Anglia Miltonum, jactat utrique parem."

It is perhaps sufficient simply to mention Dryden's adaptation for the stage of *Paradise Lost*. In the *Author's Apology*, 1677, prefixed to this unforunate adaptation, Dryden characterized Milton's epic as "one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems that either this age or this nation has produced."

[25] *Tragedies of the Last Age*, 1677, where he promises some reflections on *Paradise Lost*, "which some are pleased to call a poem."

[26] In his *Lives of the most Famous English Poets*, 1687, he speaks of Milton's fame as "gone out like a candle in the snuff."

[27] "Must above Tasso's lofty flights prevail,
Succeed where Spenser and e'en greater Milton fail."
Cf. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, II, 356. Dennis was thoroughly familiar with this passage as was also Dryden, who may have had it in mind when he declared in the Dedication of his translation of Juvenal that Milton possessed a genius greater than Cowley's and equal to Spenser's.

[28] *Poems in Two Parts*, 1679.

[29] *Situation of Paradise Found out*, 1683.

[30] *Design of the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 1691. For most of the preceding references, in this account of Milton's early influence, I am indebted to Mr. Havens's articles.

[31] *Original Letters*, p. 78.

Though Dennis designated[82] this characterization as the first statement "disclosing in so public a manner an extraordinary Opinion of Milton's extraordinary Merit," he censured the adaptation of *Paradise Lost* and declared that Dryden, as he himself had confessed, did not at the time of his altering the great epic know one half of its merit.[83] Indeed for many years Dryden was suspicious of the blank verse of the poem and once declared[84] that while he could not justify Milton in its use, he might "excuse him by the example of Hanibal Caro and other Italians" who had employed it. On the whole, however, Dryden showed a generous and an increasing appreciation of Milton, which was probably responsible in large measure for that afterwards exhibited by Dennis.

Possibly the influence of Dryden would have been sufficient to attract Dennis to a careful study of Milton, even if he had not been urged to it by his own patriotic and moralistic tendencies. Some of Dennis's other friends, however, are to be remembered as probably stimulating his interest in that poet. Bishop Atterbury, whom we have noticed as one of his companions in the years of early manhood, must be mentioned among those evincing a notable admiration for Milton; and it is not improbable that his desire that "some excellent spirit" might arise, "that had leisure enough, and resolution to break the charm, and free us from the troublesome bondage of Rhyming, as Mr. Milton calls it,"[85] may have helped shape Dennis's determination to champion blank verse. In 1694 appeared Addison's commendation of Milton in the familiar *Account of the Greatest English Poets;* and in the same year was published Gildon's *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays on Several Subjects,* which contains *To Mr. T. S. in Vindication of Mr. Milton's Paradise Lost.* The relations between Dennis and Gildon were at this time so intimate, and their views in such close accord, that doubtless they mutually stimulated each other in their admiration for the puritan poet.

Just when Dennis gained this love for Milton is hard to

[82] *Original Letters,* p. 75.

[83] For Dryden's later opinion of Milton, see Ker, II, 28.

[84] *Discourse concerning Satire, Works,* XIII, 20.

[85] *Englische Studien,* 1909, p. 178.

say. It seems, however, that the date should be fixed about 1692, for though at that time he was still employing the couplet, he then acknowledged[36] the greatness of the author of *Paradise Lost*. Soon after that his poems began to show frank imitations of Milton, both of the great epic, and, what is more remarkable at that time, of the minor poems. These imitations reached their height with his verses on the battle of Blenheim in such lines as "And swinging slow with hoarse and sullen roar." Jacob, in his *Poetical Register*,[37] 1719, recognized this imitation of Milton as one of Dennis's commendable qualities and declared that our author had "come nearest that sublime Poet of any of his Contemporaries,"[38] an opinion which was later echoed by Pope's biographer, Ayre.[39] Pope himself, on the other hand, ridiculed[40] Dennis's attempts at the sublimity of Milton.

One of the strongest influences in attracting Dennis to Milton was the pronouncedly religious character of the great poet's work. In Milton Dennis found a writer who had drawn a tragedy from the Bible[41] and had owed the exaltation of his noblest passages to the power of the Christian religion, an exaltation so powerful that it had surpassed anything in antiquity.[42] Unquestionably Dennis's insistence upon strong emotion as the basis of poetry was fostered by his admiration for Milton; but it seems probable, also, from all contemporary accounts of the critic that, mixed with his rationalistic and

[36] Preface to the *Passion of Byblis*.

[37] In this same notice Jacob comments thus on Dennis's poem on the battle of *Blenheim:* "The following lines in it, in my Opinion, are very near on an Equality with Milton, and they are writ after the manner of his Hymn to the Creator, 'Begin my Soul, and strike the living lyre.'" He then quotes about thirty lines. *Poetical Register*, I, 260 ff.

[38] *Ibid.*, I, 258.

[39] *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Alexander Pope*, I, 47.

[40] *Grub Street Journal*, February 5, 1730.

[41] "and then arose another famous Reformer, *John Milton* by Name, who not only left a Tragedy behind him, the Story of which he impiously borrow'd from the Bible, written, to leave him without excuse, in his mature, nay declining years, but has left a fine Enconium on Shakespear;" *Original Letters*, p. 236.

[42] Works, II, 430.

dogmatic tendencies was a strong strain of emotionalism,[43] manifesting itself in the many impetuous acts which we have noticed in the biography; and this side of the critic, in its turn, welcomed the exaltation of Milton's poetry.[44] It was this exaltation, this sublimity, Dennis maintained, that had enabled Milton to compose the "most lofty and most irregular Poem, that had ever been produced by the mind of man."[45] He had surpassed Vergil and Homer in that he was "more lofty, more terrible, more vehement, more astonishing, and had more divine raptures."[46] Furthermore, in writing *Paradise Lost*

[43] In his *Harlequin Horace*, 1731, p. 49, the Reverend James Miller apostrophises our author thus:

"O! Dennis eldest of the scribbling Throng,
Tho' skill'd thyself in every Art of Song,
Tho' also of thy Mother-Goddess full,
By Inspiration furiously dull."

[44] In apologizing for his style in a letter discussing Milton's sublimity, Dennis states that he found it "next to impossible to resist the violent Emotions which the Greatness of the Subject raised in" him. *Proposals for printing . . . Miscellaneous Tracts*, 1721, p. 16.

[45] This statement and others following in the paragraph for which no sources are noted, are based on Dennis's *Specimen, Being the Substance of what will be said in the Beginning of the Criticism of Milton* prefatory to the *Grounds of Criticism*, 1704.

[46] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism*, p. 17. Dennis's strong insistence upon regarding sublimity as Milton's great distinguishing quality is well illustrated by his censures of Roscommon's and more especially of Addison's criticisms of *Paradise Lost:*

"I. They have not allow'd that *Milton* in the Sublimity of his Thoughts surpass'd both Ancients and Moderns.

"II. In their Observations which they have made on *Paradise Lost*, they have insisted too much upon things in which *Milton* has equals, instead of dwelling entirely on that Sublimity which is his distinguishing and characteristic Quality, and which sets him above Mankind.

"III. In citing Passages from him which are truly sublime, they have often fail'd of setting his Sublimity in a true Light, and of shewing it to all its Advantage.

"IV. In those Passages whose Sublimity they have set in a true Light, they have not observ'd to the honour of Milton, and our Country, that the Thoughts and Images are Original, and the genuine Offspring of Milton's transcendent Genius.

"V. They have not shewn how *Milton's* Sublimity is distinguish'd from the other Poets in this Respect, that where he has excelled all other Poets

Milton had transgressed the laws of Aristotle, not through any disrespect for them, but because he recognized that if he should follow these precepts which were based on the practice of Homer, he must share the fate of the many copyists who had fallen short of the greatness of the Greek poet. Hence he had represented not the conflict of man and man, as had Homer, but of the Devil and man; and this new and strange subject had thrown him upon strange thoughts and new expressions that could not be judged by the precepts of Aristotle. In these thoughts and images, and consequently in his spirit, Milton had the advantage of both Homer and Vergil. But after thus praising Milton's excellencies, the critic promised to note his defects, and to do it all the more carefully, "because some of them ought to be avoided with the utmost Caution as being so great that they would be Insupportable in any one who had not his Extraordinary Distinguishing Qualities." With the words just quoted, however, Dennis closed the specimen of his proposed discussion of Milton, so we must look elsewhere for his statements regarding his favorite's limitations. One such limitation to Milton's greatness the critic found in his failure to attain in practice to the art of Vergil and Homer, with which he was so well acquainted in theory, and which would have brought to perfection the great epic inspired by his genius. "Near a sixth part of the poem," Dennis maintained in his *Remarks upon the Dunciad,* "is set down for want of Art. For this Poem is so ordered that the Subject of the eleventh and twelfth Books could by no means supply him with the great ideas, and consequently with the great Spirit, which the first, second, and sixth books had done before." This same willingness to admit what he considered the limitations of his favorite poet appeared[47] also in his reply to Addison's discussion of Milton's great epic. Dennis maintained that the "Spectator" had "published a certain Criticism upon Milton, in which the reverse of almost every thing he

in what he has expresst, he has left ten times more to be understood than what he has suggested, which is the surest and noblest mark, and the most transporting Effect of Sublimity." *Proposals for printing . . . Miscellaneous Tracts,* 1721, p. 3.

[47] Introduction to the *Remarks upon Cato.*

affirmed is true; That he had the assurance to say in it, That the Paradise Lost of Milton has an Unity of Action, whereas in that Poem, there are more apparently two Actions, the War of the Angels being an Action in itself, and having a just beginning, middle, and end." Our author failed to realize how he had really broken with the rules in his appreciation of *Paradise Lost,* and how Addison, who preached against the "regular critics," was bound by their precepts; but if Dennis were entitled for no other reason to a permanent place in the history of literary criticism, he should be remembered as perhaps the first ardent and persistent champion of Milton, and he should be recognized for having repeatedly praised and emphasized that poet's "Sublimity and matchless Harmony," qualities which have stood the test of more than two centuries.

Though Dennis never placed Dryden on the same footing with Milton, he entertained, as might be expected, a very high opinion of his writings,[48] and he ranked them above those of Boileau and Racine. Of Dryden's plays, considered individually, Dennis said but little, beyond condemning[49] the *State of Innocence* as a sorry imitation of Milton and *All for Love* as morally bad. The use of the blank verse in the *Spanish Friar,* however, seemed to him especially good. Indeed he affirmed[50] that for purity the English language had nothing better to show than Dryden's blank verse, which combined "the easiness of Prose with the Dignity and strength of Poetry." This perfection, Dennis continued, was equalled only by that of Dryden's heroic couplets, in which "he will never be excelled by any man, unless Time make some strange alterations in the Tongue." But most interesting of all was Dennis's deliberate judgment of his master which we have already noted, but which deserves repetition as, possibly, the soundest and most acute summary of Dryden's excellences left us by any of his critics. In a letter to Jacob Tonson, the bookseller, concerning the alleged conspiracy in 1715 against the reputation of Dryden, Dennis wrote thus:[51]

[48] *Letters upon Several Occasions,* p. 49.
[49] *Original Letters,* p. 75.
[50] *Impartial Critick,* in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* III, 153.
[51] *Original Letters,* p. 290.

"I hope you will excuse my Affection for the Memory, and my Zeal for the Reputation of my departed Friend, whom I infinitely esteem'd when living for the Solidity of his Thought, for the Spring, the Warmth, and the beautiful Turn of it; for the Power, and Variety, and Fullness of his Harmony; for the Purity, the Perspecuity, the Energy of his Expression; and (whenever the following great Qualities were requir'd) for the Pomp and Solemnity, and Majesty of his Style."

Of a long list of other English writers Dennis at some time expressed his admiration—Butler, Roscommon, Denham, Waller, Wycherley, Otway, Etheredge, Shadwell, Crowne, Congreve, Ambrose Philips.[52] It may be sufficient to note that he was generous in his praise of all of these writers, particularly of Wycherley, whose *Plain Dealer* he ranked as one of the world's greatest comedies,[53] and of Congreve whom he considered second only to Wycherley as a playwright.[54] Of course Dennis's judgments of many of these writers were the ordinarily accepted ones of his day; and possibly some of them, as with most critics, were influenced by his prejudices. But comparing his judgments of these authors with the opinions of other critics of his time, and with those confirmed by the passing of two centuries, we must agree, it seems, that Dennis's estimates of specific writers, expressed before his senescence, are entitled to a much more careful consideration than they have generally received.

X

His Position in Criticism and his Influence

It is noticeable that the list of writers whom Dennis praised, quoted in the preceding section, contains but few authors whose important works fell in his later years; and it is also significant that nearly every member of the younger generation, about 1710, whose writings were popular, came under his condemnation. Against the charge that his criticisms were ill natured, however, he was continually at warfare. Even as early as 1697[1] he felt it necessary to defend his

[52] Preface to the *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers.*

[53] Possibly Dennis's high regard for this play came from Dryden. See Ker, I, 182.

[54] *Letters upon Several Occasions,* p. 79.

[1] Preface to the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* where he argues ardently and at length in defense of critics and criticism.

practice against this charge; and for one who fought so stoutly and so unsparingly, he was extremely sensitive to the accusation.[2] Dennis's nature contained something of the born dissenter, and he was fearless in expressing his opinions. Doubtless, too, he was somewhat soured by his failure to obtain recognition from the public and from the government. But it may be questioned whether these conditions ever consciously influenced him in his assaults upon more successful writers. For, as he repeatedly affirmed, he attacked them not because they had succeeded, but because he believed they had done so undeservedly and for the most part through the efforts of cabals. Against such combinations Dennis continually inveighed, declaring that any poet of genius would scorn these devices as destructive of the national muse. As late as 1717 he asserted that he was so far from bearing malice toward those whom he criticized [*i. e.*, Pope] that he was willing "to own their good qualities, and to do them any manner of Service that lay in [his] little Power." But in his very latest criticisms Dennis frankly took the position that he had suffered injuries which admitted of no legal redress, and that he therefore entered the lists not only for furthering the public good but also for avenging private wrongs.[3] Dennis's earlier criticisms, however, impress the reader with his attempts to be impartial and judicial. Repeatedly he declared that he had consulted his friends about the matter in hand, and he evidently tried in his better work to state fairly and honestly the other side of the question.[4] Even in his

[2] *Original Letters*, p. 202; Preface to the *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism;* Preface to the *Monument.* Possibly the first accusation of ill nature brought in print against Dennis is that by the author of a *Comparison between the Two Stages*, 1702, p. 181, who in commenting on the critic's failures as a dramatist, remarks: "These repeated Disappointments, I hope, have cured him of the Itch of Play Making; let him stick to his Criticisms and find fault with others, because he does ill himself."

[3] "I entered these disputes partly to advance the Public Good, by advancing a noble Art, and partly to retort private Injuries; . . . either cause is in itself good and just, and both together are strong and powerful, and I . . . shall have both together to apologise for my present undertaking." *Remarks upon Cato*, p. 7.

[4] *Original Letters*, p. 403.

Remarks upon Pope's Translation of Homer he affirmed that he had attempted to write with fairness and to give no faults that he did not find in the translation.[5] Furthermore, in these same *Remarks* he acknowledged an earlier blunder of his own.[6]

So far as in him lay, Dennis strove in his best work not only to be logical but also to put his argument into such form as would appeal most easily and most convincingly to his readers. Some of his writings, it is true, such as the *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* evince little attempt at any regular method of discussion; but most of the important critiques, including the *Remarks on Prince Arthur,* the *Large Account of the Taste in Poetry,* the *Remarks upon Cato,* and most notably the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* show careful planning by the writer. In his more pretentious work Dennis took pains to define the terms he employed[7] and frequently cast his arguments into syllogistic form.[8] The use of the dilemma, too, became characteristic of his style of argument. Restatements, summaries, and recapitulations are also frequent in Dennis's writings, especially in the *Advancement and Reformation,* where he sometimes carries them to the point of weariness in his desire that the reader may not miss the thread of the argument. Possibly at times this argument becomes, as Mr. Saintsbury describes[9] it, "a clatter of assertion;" but Dennis was at least intellectually honest and tried to convey as clearly as he could what he conceived to be the truth.

With his attempts at clearness he strove to couple a variety and elevation of style. For example, he even went so far in his desire to diversify his *Remarks on Prince Arthur* as to introduce a fragment from one of his own unfinished dramas; while to relieve the reader after a long stretch of reasoning in the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* he cited several illustrative passages from the poets. In his criticisms he aimed at force

[5] *Remarks upon Pope's Homer,* p. 97.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 83.

[7] Possibly this attitude was a result of his respect for Hobbes. See Hobbes's *Works,* London, 1740, III, 23.

[8] E. g., Chap. IV of the *Usefulness of the Stage.*

[9] *History of Criticism,* II, 433.

and grace and attained them oftener than in either his poems or his plays. Pope seems to have recognized Dennis's attempts at elevation and to have hit at him when, in the *Essay on Criticism,* he praised Longinus for judging with fire. At any rate Dennis took the thrust to himself and retorted[10] thus:

> [Pope] "condemns his Contemporaries for no other Reason but that they are his Contemporaries. For why should not a modern critic imitate the qualities of Longinus; and when he treats of a subject that is sublime, treat of it with Sublimity?—But pray, who are the Moderns that judge with Fury but write with Flegm? Who are they who have writ both Criticism and Poetry, who have not in their Poetry shewn a thousand times more than this Essayer's Fire?"

And there is no mistaking the nature of Dennis's answer to his own question. Sometimes one is tempted to believe that he occasionally relied upon the enthusiasm of the moment to make amends for the absence of hard, consistent labor; for while, as has been stated, his more pretentious work was carefully planned and executed, time after time he declared in his shorter tracts that he had written hurriedly, and that he was thoroughly tired of his task.[11]

But on the whole Dennis's style in his criticisms was a very good one—at times one might call it admirable, and that too after making allowance for the superabundance of strong expletives and a burly humor, which is free from slime, though not from mud. Indeed one sometimes wonders at the difference between the dull and heavy style of his dramas and the firm and often elevated style of his criticisms. But this contradiction in his style was but one of the many in the man himself.

The contradiction noticed in the preceding paragraph, indeed, is evident not only in Dennis's style but in his whole critical position, which we may now summarize. At bottom Dennis was a rationalist, or better a dogmatist who supported his positions by asserting that they were based upon reason. The age was in part responsible for his attitude, especially in his

[10] *Reflections upon an Essay on Criticism,* p. 18. Cf. Disraeli's *Calamities of Authors,* London, 1867, p. 57.

[11] Prefaces to the *Court of Death,* to *Blenheim,* the *Impartial Critick,* the *Usefulness of the Stage, Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer,* and elsewhere.

earlier years when he was very susceptible to the ideas of others. But a certain positiveness and assertiveness of nature would have made him a dogmatist in any age. His education was such as to inspire him with a love for the classics and a respect for their authority, but that respect never became a servile regard but rather the admiration of one who felt that the classics were great and good only as they conformed to the eternal dictates of reason. In the majority of his beliefs he agreed with the prevailing ideas, especially in his regard for the different classes of literature and their commonly accepted characteristics. He further agreed with current custom in that as a critic he confined himself largely to a discussion of the epic and the drama, and that as a playwright he chose nearly all his themes from the life of the court and the city and treated them with "regularity."

But there was in him another and, for the history of criticism, a more important side. For Dennis went beyond his age in appreciating that "a clear head and an accurate understanding alone are not sufficient to make a poet," and in reasserting time after time that emotion is the real basis of poetry. To his age he stood as the champion of "the furious joy and pride of soul," which he called the distinguishing mark of literary genius. In his attempt to emphasize emotion as the basis of poetry he proposed as the source of material for poetic inspiration not the Greek and Roman masterpieces venerated by the neo-classicists but the holy scriptures, a suggestion which was simply revolutionary. In his early recognition of Milton as the poet of sublime emotions, Dennis was so far in advance of his age that it is scarcely an exaggeration to maintain that his criticisms contain the first appreciation of *Paradise Lost* which may be considered as at all adequate. Dennis was also a pioneer of his times in emphasizing the relation of emotion and versification, in discussing the difference between ordinary emotion and emotion recollected in tranquility (to use Wordsworth's phrasing), as the basis of poetry, and in championing the cause of unrhymed verse when the heroic couplet was dominant. Moreover, his appreciation of Shakspere was decidedly in advance of his time. To him is also to

be credited one of the earliest, if not the first, book review in a modern sense. Then too, in his better critical days he viewed literature dynamically rather than statically, recognized a standard of taste beyond judgment, and analyzed the conditions making for the taste of his age. Furthermore, though he wrote of and for the city, he manifested a keen delight in nature[11a] and seems to have gone beyond any other writer of his age in his appreciation of her sublime aspects.[12] In a word, Dennis was possessed of a large, if not always well regulated, emotional nature and of considerable critical acumen, which frequently clashed with his respect for the rules and pointed the way to a better conception of literature.

In his later years, as has been indicated, he became more and more the champion of the rules. Such conservatism, which might well be explained by his increasing years, was fostered by the conflicts in which he engaged. The old critic who entered the lists as the champion of liberty and religion came to speak, as someone has said, with the authority of an infallible church. After he was sixty, Dennis insisted, with the assurance of one who knows himself in the right, upon the observance of the various types and even refused the name of poetry to such writings as did not conform to these standards. Against the recognition of any new class of writings he grew bitterly opposed. For example, he himself, who as a young writer had employed and defended burlesque, in his old age could scarcely find condemnation sufficiently severe for its successor, the mock epic. These later years also reveal in Dennis's work an increased attention to matters of verbal criticism, sometimes just, but more often the cavils of one looking for faults. But even in these evil days he maintained his admira-

[11a] "As when a thoughtful man forsakes the Town,
And to some Country Solitude goes down,
With more than common pleasure he beholds
The Woods, the Lawns, the Valleys, and the Folds.
Nature's bright Beauties everywhere he meets,
His Soul, which long had been confin'd in Streets,
With Rapture now her kindred Objects greets."
"Prologue Written by Mr. Dennis" for Oldmixon's *Amintas*, 1698.

[12] *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose*, p. 137; *Original Letters*, pp. 30ff.

tion for Milton and his insistence upon emotion as the basis of poetry, and for these we may forgive many things.

Just what was the influence Dennis's views exerted upon his contemporaries, it is hard to say. His reputation in the first part of the eighteenth century was well established in England and may have extended to the continent.[13] Indeed through the first quarter of the eighteenth century Dennis was commonly regarded as England's greatest critic, and it is not surprising that he felt his importance and spoke with an authority which evoked from his enemies and the wits of the town in general a certain mock respect. Gay, for example, in the preface to the *Mohocks,* declared "We look upon you to have a monopoly of English criticism in your head;" and he later joined with Pope and Arbuthnot[14] in burlesquing Dennis as the nation's foremost critic. But the general opinion was better voiced by Gildon, who in 1717[15] praised Dennis as "the most consummate critic of the age." In reply to the possible objection that Gildon's opinion was as much biased by prejudices as was Gay's, may be cited the testimony of the thoroughly impartial Giles Jacob[16]—"If I did not allow this Gentleman to be . . . the greatest Critic of this Age, I should be wanting in justice to his Character;" and this estimate was repeated near the middle of the century by Ayre in his biography of Pope.[17] We may also note that in 1723 Blackmore praised Dennis as a greater critic than Boileau.[18]

[13] "A certain Gentleman just arriv'd from Spain, and other Parts, by chance meeting Mr. Dennis, among other Compliments told him, he observ'd his Character and Writings were very much taken notice of in Foreign Parts, to which Mr. Dennis reply'd 'Yes, Sir, I know they do me Honour, but as for my own Country, the English, God's Death, they dont know there's such a Man amongst them.'" Victor's *Epistle to Sir Richard Steele on his Play called the Conscious Lovers, 1722.*

[14] In *Three Hours after Marriage.*

[15] *Complete Art of Poetry,* I, 185.

[16] *Poetical Register,* 1719, I, 258.

[17] I, 47 ff.

[18] Preface to *Alfred,* iii: "There are other Gentlemen, who . . . believe no Man should attempt such a Work [*i. e.,* an epic] on the Plan of Revealed Religion . . . And in this Class are Mr. Boileau and Sir William Temple; and Mr. Dennis, who has better deserved of the Christian Religion than the last, as he is superior in critical Abilities to the first, seemed once to have

The last years of Dennis's life brought the quarrels with Addison, Pope, and Steele, which we have discussed at length, and the satires of Gay, Theobald, and Parnell. In this flood of adverse criticism and scoffing Dennis was nearly overwhelmed. All sorts of charges were brought against him, from that of ill nature to that of debasing his criticism for gaining the means of subsistence. Every critic and criticaster of the day had his fling at the old censor of letters. It is easy to see, therefore, why in his later years Dennis exerted but little influence; for any critic of the day who might have given a thoughtful consideration to his doctrines, might well have hesitated to acknowledge any indebtedness.

His position regarding the emotions excited considerable comment during the earlier years of the eighteenth century. The more friendly attitude toward his views is that exemplified in the verses ascribed to Dr. King;[19] while the hostile attitude found expression in the laughs and gibes at "Sir Longinus" both on and off the stage.[20] Pope's fling may be cited as characteristic, for while he could descant upon rapture warming the

the same Judgment. In this same year appeared another reference to Dennis's rank as a critic. Benjamin Victor, who took sides with Steele in the quarrel over the *Conscious Lovers,* declared in the preface to his *Vindication* of that play that he proposed to show "that the Great Critic of the Age (in his own Opinion) is no Critic at all."

[19] "While Dennis aids the Muse to sing,
Or gives her plumes, or clips her wing,
Directs her cautious how to fly,
Unbeaten paths along the sky;
With safety we sublimely stray,
And soaring gain the realms of day,
Till trembling from the heights above,
And dazzling orbs o'er which we move;
We gently sink in humbler strains,
To vales beneath and rural plains."

In J. Nichols's *Short Collection of Poems with Notes Biographical and Historical,* London, 1780, III, 55. From *Bibliotheca; a Poem occasioned by the Sight of a Modern Library.* "This is ascribed to Dr. King upon conjecture only. It was published in 1712, the winter before *his* death by *his* publisher, and is very much in his manner." Nichols's Note.

[20] "Never was there in our Nation a time when Folly and Extravagance of every kind were more sharply inspected, or wittily ridiculed." Shaftsbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,* 1708.

mind,[21] he ridiculed[22] "the poetic rage and enthusiasm of which Mr. Dennis hath been so highly possessed; . . . those extraordinary motions whereof he so feelingly treats." It is difficult, however, to indicate any direct influence[23] of Dennis's insistence upon the emotional element in poetry. As the tenet of one of the foremost critics of the time, it probably met with a certain recognition which never found any very tangible expression. To the literary student of today it is interesting as at least a forecast of the practice of the romanticists.

Dennis's proposal to restore poetry by the infusion of religion, if not very potent directly,[24] at least represents a strong

[21] *Essay on Criticism*, l. 235.

[22] *Dunciad*, Note to I, 106. In his *Prologue to a Play for Mr. Dennis's Benefit*, 1733, Pope characterized our critic as

"A desp'rate bulwark, sturdy, firm, and fierce
Against the Gothic sons of frozen verse." *Works*, IV, 418.

[23] The student of Dennis is frequently tantalized by suggestions of possible instances of the critic's influence, as, for example, in the writings of Lady Winchilsea. She was a friend of Dennis's associate Rowe (the *Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea*, by Myra Reynolds, Chicago, 1903, p. liii) and published her first poems in the *Miscellanies* of the critic's boon companion Gildon in 1701, just at the time that our author was doing his most original critical thinking. Sixteen years later she was satirized along with Dennis in the *Three Hours After Marriage*, where she is represented as reading to him one of her plays. Furthermore, we know that she was deeply interested in the critical thought of the times (*Op. cit.*, cxi) and that her nephew with whom she lived on very intimate terms was one of the subscribers to Dennis's proposed *magnum opus* in 1704 and therefore possessed at least the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, which contained our critic's views on the possibilities of uniting religion and poetry developed as far as he ever carried them. To this we may add that Lady Winchilsea produced in the years immediately following the promulgation of Dennis's theory a number of paraphrases of different parts of the scripture. Possibly too, her interest in the fable may have been stimulated by Dennis's efforts in that form of writing. At any rate her fables are written in the La Fontaine-L'Estrange style which Dennis had imitated a decade before. While all this evidence fails to prove any influence of Dennis upon Lady Winchilsea, it suggests strongly the possibility of such influence and exemplifies interestingly the many points of possible contact between our critic and the other writers of his time.

[24] Aaron Hill, who after 1730 took a kindly interest in Dennis, may have been influenced by the critic in undertaking his numerous paraphrases of the scriptures. It is at least noticeable that he versified nearly

current in the literature of the age. The tragedies of his friend Rowe exhibit these same moralistic tendencies, as do also the comedies of his early friend and late enemy Steele, which Hazlitt has characterized as "homilies in dialogue."[25] As examples of the workings of this force in other branches of letters may be cited Shaftsbury's moralistic writings and, even better, the *Tatler* and *Spectator,* whose professed purpose was "to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality." Addison was, of course, well acquainted with Dennis's theory, which may have stimulated his interest in writing hymns. As a more definite result of Dennis's doctrine may be cited the publication of the *Collection of Divine Hymns,* 1709, which has been noticed in the biography. In his *Complete Art of Poetry* Gildon frankly incorporated Dennis's views on the relation of poetry and religion into his scheme for systematizing poetic theory; and Blackmore both in his *Creation* and in the preface to his *Redemption* indicates that he knew and favored Dennis's position. Possibly, too, the physician-poetaster may have been stimulated by Dennis's theory in undertaking his *New Version of the Psalms of David, fitted for the Tunes used in Churches,* 1721, which proved a very popular hymnal.[25a] Here, too, we may note that in the *Plain Dealer* for January 18, 1725, appeared a letter vigorously censuring the "Bible Versions of the Psalms and the Prophets" in use in the churches, and praising Dennis's efforts to elevate and restore sacred poetry.

Later in the century Goldsmith emphasized[26] the close rela-

all of Dennis's favorite passages from the Old Testament. It is, moreover, interesting to note in connection with this possible influence by Dennis that Hill also wrote a *Poem in Praise of Blank Verse.* Both he and his friend the poet Thomson were at least fairly well acquainted with Dennis's critical beliefs.

[25] *Comic Writers,* Lecture VIII.

[25a] There was, however, both in this and in the preceding age a great deal of religious paraphrasing. Waller had done it years before, as had Parnell and others contemporary with Dennis, so we must be careful in assigning any special influence to our critic.

[26] "Poetry in its infant state was the language of devotion and love. It was the voice and expression of the heart of man when ravished with the view of numberless blessings that perpetually flowed from God, the

tion of religion and poetry in a manner that seems to indicate he was acquainted with the works of Dennis. If he did not borrow his ideas from the older critic, he at least expressed them in language quite similar to that of the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*. It is much more doubtful whether Wordsworth was acquainted with Dennis's theories; but there is at least an interesting parallel between Dennis's belief that ideas in meditation furnish the best material for poetry and Wordsworth's well known doctrine that the basis of poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility." Again, some of the ideas in the *Essay Supplementary to the Preface of the Lyrical Ballads*, emphasizing the "affinity between religion and poetry," are in substantial agreement with those we have discussed. Indeed as we read in Wordsworth's Preface to the edition of 1815 that "The grand store houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination of poetical, as contradistinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures and the works of Milton," we realize that here are Dennis's doctrines reappearing after a hundred years. The present writer has been unable, however, to show definitely that Wordsworth was influenced by Dennis's writings.

In considering the question of the influence of Dennis's admiration for Milton upon the other writers of the age,[27] we may well notice the following passage from his *Observations*

fountain of goodness." Newbery's *Art of Poetry*, I, ii. "What we have said of the origin of poetry will account for the necessity there is for that enthusiasm, that fertility of invention, those sallies of imagination, lofty ideals, noble sentiments, bold and figurative expression, harmony of numbers, and indeed the natural love of the grand, sublime, and marvellous, which are the essential characteristics of the great poet." *Ibid.*, iii. Other critics of the eighteenth century who have discussed the relation of religion and poetry, such as Bishop Hurd (*Works*, 1811, II, 168) appear quite ignorant of Dennis's theorizing.

[27] Possibly Thomson, who befriended Dennis's old age, may have had his interest in Milton and in blank verse strengthened by the old critic. Cf. his lines from *Autumn* in praise of Philips as Milton's successor:

> "Philips, Pomona's bard, the second thou
> Who nobly durst in rime-unfettered verse
> With British freedom sing the British song."

Blackmore, too, may have been influenced by Dennis's doctrines. See the preface to his *Creation*, xlvi.

on Paradise Lost, included in the *Proposal for printing* the *Miscellaneous Tracts,* 1721. This passage indicates clearly his attitude toward the "Spectator's" criticisms of Milton's poem:

"in most of the Treatises which I have publish'd for Thirty Years, even in those in which I have unhappily engag'd to detect and blame the Errors of some of my Contemporaries, I have not been able to forbear pointing at several of the matchless Beauties of Milton. In the *Remarks on Prince Arthur* I cited at large the sublime Description of *Satan* in the first Book of that Poem: and the speech of that fallen Arch-Angel in the fourth, which begins with the noble Apostrophe to the Sun.

"In the *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* which was published in 1700, I shew'd the vast advantage which *Milton* had over *Ovid,* and ev'n *Virgil* himself, in his Description of Chaos and the Creation.

"In the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,* which Book was published in 1704, you know very well, Sir, that I cited at large the Description of the Descent of *Raphael* in the fifth Book, and the glorious Hymn to the Creator in the same Book, and likewise the Divine colloquy between God and *Adam* in the Eighth Book.

"Some Persons, who long since the Publication of the foremention'd Treatises began to write Notes on the *Paradise Lost,* have made particular mention of the same Beauties which I had mark'd out before, without making any Mention of me. Tho' you know very well Sir, that I can bring unquestionable Proof that those Person's had read the foremention'd Treatises, and read them with Applause; but I should not be the least concern'd at the treating me so unfairly, if they had done justice to *Milton,* thro' the course of their Criticisms."

That Addison was consciously or unconsciously indebted to Dennis seems quite probable. His scheme for discussing the poem is, as has frequently been noted, that of Le Bossu, which our critic had employed in judging Blackmore's *Prince Arthur.* Furthermore, while it may be urged that it is possible that Addison may have selected as "Beauties" those passages formerly praised by the older writer, it seems probable that his attention may have been called to some of them at least by his friend's eulogies of them. Then too, Dennis had insisted beyond any other writer of the times upon recognizing as the preeminent quality of Milton's poem a sublimity surpassing that of any other writer ancient or modern; and in beginning his comments Addison had emphasized this quality very much in

the manner of Dennis.[27a] Again, we may note that Addison repeated Dennis's statement that Milton's Hymn at the Creation is based upon the 148th Psalm, and that the "Spectator's" comments upon Milton's description of Chaos closely resemble our critic's discussion of the same subject. That Addison should have made no mention in these papers of the well-recognized champion of Milton is to be explained, perhaps, by the strained relations between him and his fellow critic at the time of the publication of these appreciations. At any rate there can be but little doubt that Addison's interest in Milton was stimulated by the repeated and enthusiastic praise Dennis bestowed upon that poet.

On a single later critic was Dennis's influence pronouncedly marked. Dr. Johnson read and considered his writings carefully, took as his own many of the opinions there stated, and expressed the desire that Dennis's works might be collected.[28] It is, of course, too much to say that Johnson's advocacy of the theory of poetic justice was due entirely to Dennis's teaching, for the idea was common enough; but he unquestionably weighed our critic's arguments and was, it seems probable, influenced by them.[29] In his lives of Addison and of Pope Johnson made frequent allusions to and quotations from Dennis's criticisms of these authors. Some of the Doctor's phrases concerning the old critic are fairly well known, such as his statement that Dennis "found and shewed many faults in Cato," that "he shewed them indeed in anger, but he shewed them with acuteness, such as ought to rescue his work from oblivion." Johnson then proceeded to incorporate in his *Life of Addison* several pages of the *Remarks upon Cato,* possibly, as was maliciously suggested by one contemporary,[30] to "swell his pay." He accepted Dennis's criticisms of the play as quite

[27a] Defoe in the notes to *Jure Divino,* 1706, had declared that in his opinion Milton was the greatest master of the sublime in any language. Perhaps such talk was then common enough to make it possible that Addison did not think especially of Dennis.

[28] Hill's *Johnsonian Miscellanies,* III, 40.

[29] Preface to his edition of Shakespere, xix.

[30] Horace Walpole's *Letters,* Oxford, 1906, II, 376: "[Johnson] has reprinted Dennis's criticism of Cato to save time and swell his pay."

pertinent, though he ended by declaring that "as we love better to be pleased than to be taught, Cato is read, and the critic neglected." Johnson also quoted a part of Dennis's comment on Addison's praise of *Chevy Chase* and endorsed the critic's condemnation of the ballad. He further showed himself a close student of Dennis in his criticisms of Pope,[31] many of which are in large measure merely restatements of our author's judgments. But on the whole, Johnson was less influenced by Dennis's criticisms of Pope than by his judgments of Addison.

Johnson's respect for Dennis, however, was in marked contrast with the general opinions of his age, for the view most commonly accepted was that expressed in Cibber's *Lives of the Poets* where the critic is represented as a disappointed aspirant for the crown of wit.[32] Frequently, too, in such skits as Thos. Cooke's *Battle of the Poets,* the first edition of which had appeared in 1725 during Dennis's life, the old critic was assigned a part in keeping with his reputation for asperity;[33] while by still other writers, less friendly, he was often

[31] *Lives of the Poets,* London, 1825, IV, 172, 173, 178, 179, 185, 253.

[32] "His perpetual misfortune was that he aimed at the empire of wit, for which nature had not sufficiently endowed him; and as his ambition prompted him to obtain the crown by a furious opposition to all competitors, so, like Caesar of old, his ambition overwhelmed him." IV, 238.

[33] In the second canto of the *Battle of the Poets* (*Mr. Cooke's Original Poems,* etc., London, ed. of 1742, p. 31), Dennis is thus described:

> "Dennis, whose veins with youthful Vigour flow,
> Firm as an Oak beneath the Weight of Snow,
> True Foe to Vice, to Modern Bards the Dread,
> Who spurious wit hath oft in Triumph led,
> Rears, as Apollo and the nine inspire,
> With hands tremendous the vindictive Fire.
> Dauntless he rages o'er the hostile Ground;
> And of the slumb'ring Chiefs, the Labours round
> He views and seizes in th' unguarded Hour
> From each an Off'ring to the offended Power.
> From Pope he bears no slender Sacrifice;
> In flaming Rolls Volumes on Volumes rise:
> With the marr'd Grecian stories fed the Flame,
> Thy Praise, Cecilia, and the Temple Fame."

ridiculed as selling his judgment for a dinner.[34] Voltaire, who gained most of his information about Dennis from Pope and his friends frequently sneered at the old gallophobe and compared[35] him with a pigs'-tongue tester. Later, Dibdin found[36] Dennis's vanity his chief characteristic; and some of the biographers of Addison, Steele, and Pope discovered[37] in him a "literary hangman," without the smallest particle of literary acumen. But something of a reaction is noticeable a half century after Dennis's death. Bowles, in his edition of Pope,[38] defended some of Dennis's criticisms and pleaded for a more lenient judgment of the man on the score of his bitter disappointments in life; and Cowper found[39] in him "a very sensible fellow," who had "passed some censures on both" Ad-

[34] *E. g.*, the Reverend James Miller in his *Harlequin Horace*, 1731, p. 56, says:

> "And next old *Dennis* with a Supper treat,
> He'll like your *Poem* as he likes your *Meat;*
> For give that growling Cerberus but a *Sop*,
> He'll close his Jaws, and sleep like any Top."

[35] *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1829, XXXVIII, 254.

[36] *History of the English Stage*, London, 1800, IV, 356.

[37] *E. g.*, Montgomery, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Sir Richard Steele*, Edinburg, 1865, II, 47. Montgomery here speaks thus of Dennis: "Indeed he was worse than a hangman, who merely executes a painful but necessary duty. Dennis, on the contrary, indulged in wanton cruelty; and if he had been the functionary referred to, he would have treated his victim to a preliminary rehearsal of his office before executing it."

[38] "I cannot help feeling that poor Dennis was hardly used. He was a scholar, had a liberal education, and had been, in his early youth, a companion to those who were distinguished for rank and literature. Being at first countenanced, and having a considerable share of learning and ingenuity, he was no doubt mortified and galled, to find the stream of popular applause turned almost exclusively to one Poet. [On this account, his strictures, though often just, are marked with asperity and coarseness.] . . . Let us remember what is due to *disappointment*. Dennis came into the world with ardent hopes as a man of literature, and with respectable connections. He found all of his expectations crossed, though he was conscious of his acquirements; and after long and ineffectual struggles toward attaining what he considered his deserved rank of literary eminence, he sank at last, poor and unfriended, into old age." Bowles, *Works of Alexander Pope in Verse and Prose*, London, 1806, IV, 28.

[39] Letter to the Reverend Walter Bagot, July 4, 1786.

dison and Pope "that had they been less just, would have hurt less."

The first half of the nineteenth century saw little attention paid to Dennis beyond Disraeli's characterizing him as the true mechanical critic[40] and holding him up as a horrible example, and Talfourd's really judicious consideration of his writings.[41] This latter article was the first, and still remains almost the single, serious discussion of the critic and his work; and though somewhat rhetorical, it is on the whole a just and impartial criticism. About the same time came Landor's extravagant praise[42] of our critic in ranking Dryden "knee deep below John Dennis." The middle of the century brought Thackeray's phrase "the Timon of Grub Street;" and then Lowell in the essays on Dryden and on Pope found many oases in Dennis's pedantry and declared that he had "some sound notions as a critic." Swinburne has been, perhaps, the most enthusiastic of all the later admirers of our author, declaring[43] that through the *Large Account of the Taste in Poetry* "John Dennis has proved himself as superior a critic to Addison as Coleridge or Lamb is superior to Dennis, and has also proved himself a master of English far more vigorous and spontaneous, while no less classical and lucid, than Addison and Steele." More satisfactory is the position assigned to Dennis by Mr. William Roberts,[44] who has pointed out modestly yet convincingly how the critic has as yet not received his just due. Mr. Edmund Gosse, too, has indicated in his various writings on this period some of the features for which Dennis's work deserves to be remembered. Last of all we may note that in his *History of Criticism* Mr. Saintsbury gives[45] a rather perfunctory account of Dennis, comparing him with Rymer, and finding in him the worst of a breed of critics of which Johnson was the best.

[40] *Calamities of Authors*, London, 1867, pp. 52 ff.

[41] *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Thomas Noon Talfourd*, Philadelphia, 1842.

[42] *Imaginary Conversations*, Crump ed., IV, 275.

[43] *St. James's Gazette*, November 8, 1895.

[44] *Bookworm*, Vol. IV.

[45] II, 432.

But, after all, Dennis's importance for us lies not so much in the specific doctrines he maintained, as in the fact that he was one of the earliest of his nation to devote the best of a life to criticism. Through his long and toilsome career he battled loyally for what he considered right standards of judgment, encouraged the appreciation of the greater poetry, and held contemporary literature to answer for its faults. Despite his dogmatism, despite the bitter conflicts and ridicule of his later life, Dennis gained a certain recognition for the significance of the critic's work, and he helped force a consideration of the "still-vexed" question of the value and utility of criticism.

LIST OF DENNIS'S WRITINGS

1682. *Upon the Fleet then fitting out. Written in 1682.* Included in the *Works* in 1718/19. It is not known whether this poem was ever published separately.

1692. The *tenth Ode of the Second Book of Horace imitated.* In the *Gentleman's Journal: or the Monthly Miscellany* for May.

1692. *Upon our Victory at Sea, Ibid.* for June.

1692. *Part of Juvenal's eighth Satyr, English'd, Ibid.* for October.

1692. *Verses to a Painter, drawing the Picture of a beautiful Lady, Ibid.* for November.

1692. *Poems In Burlesque; With a Dedication in Burlesque, to Fleetwood Shepherd, Esquire.*

1692. The *Passion of Byblis, made English by Mr. Dennis.*

1692/3. *To Sylvia, an Excuse for having lov'd another in her Absence, Gentleman's Journal; or the Monthly Miscellany* for January.

1693. The *Impartial Critick, or, Some Observations upon a late book entitul'd A Short view of tragedy, written by Mr. Rymer.*

1693. *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose.*

1695. The *Court of Death; a Pindarique Poem, dedicated to the Memory of her most Sacred Majesty, Queen Mary.*

1696. *Remarks on a Book, entitul'd Prince Arthur, an Heroic Poem, with some General Critical Observations, and Several New Remarks upon Virgil.*

1696. *Letters on Milton and Congreve.* This book has apparently been lost.

1696. *Letters upon Several Occasions: Written by and between Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherley, Mr. ———, Mr. Congreve, and Mr. Dennis. Published by Mr. Dennis. With a New Translation of Select Letters of Monsieur Voiture.*

1697. The *Nuptuals of Britain's Genius and Fame: a Pindarick Poem on the Peace.*

1697. A *Plot and No Plot; a Comedy, as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane.*

1697. *Miscellany Poems, By Mr. Dennis. With Select Translations of Horace, Juvenal, Mons. Boileau's Epistles, Satyrs, and Aesop's Fables in Burlesque Verse. To which is added, The Passion of Byblis, with some Critical Reflections on Mr. Oldham and his Writings, With Letters and Poems. The Second Edition with large Additions.*

1698. The *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government and to Religion. Occasion'd by a Late Book Written by Jeremy Collier, M. A.*

1698. *Prologue* for Oldmixon's *Amintas a Pastoral.*

1698. *Rinaldo and Armida, a Tragedy, as it is Acted at the Theatre in Little-Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.*

1699. *Iphigenia, a Tragedy, acted at the Theatre in Little Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.*

1701. The *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry. A Critical Discourse in Two Parts. The First, Shewing that the Principal Reason why the Ancients excel'd the Moderns in the Greater Poetry, was because they mix'd Religion with Poetry. The Second, Proving that by joining Poetry with the Religion reveal'd to us in Sacred Writ, the Modern Poets might come to equal the Ancients.*

1701(?). The *Seamen's Case.* Nothing is known of this pamphlet beyond the name and the fact that the *Essay on the Navy,* 1702, on its title page bears the statement "By the Author of the Seamen's Case."

1702. The *Comical Gallant; or the Amours of Sir John Falstaffe. A Comedy as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane by His Majesty's Servants By Mr. Dennis To Which is Added a Large Account of the Taste in Poetry and the Causes of the Degeneracy of it.*

1702. The *Danger of Priestcraft to Religion and Govern-*

ment—Occasion'd by a Discourse of Mr. Sacheverell's intitul'd: The Political Union.

1702. The *Monument: A Poem Sacred to the Immortal Memory of the Best & Greatest of Kings, William the Third King of Great Britain &c.*

1702. An *Essay on the Navy, or England's Advantage and Safety, prov'd Dependant on a Formidable and well-Disciplin'd Navy: and the Encrease and Encouragement of the Seamen.*

1703. A *Proposal for Putting a Speedy End to the War, by Ruining the Commerce of the French and the Spaniards and securing our own, without any additional Expense to the Nation.*

1704. The *Person of Quality's Answer to Mr. Collier's Letter, being a Dissuasive from the Play-house.*

1704. *Liberty Asserted. A Tragedy as it is Acted at the New Theatre in Little Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.*

1704. The *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, contain'd in some New Discoveries never made before, requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems surely. Being a Preliminary to a larger Work design'd to be publish'd in Folio, and Entitul'd, A Criticism upon our Most Celebrated English Poets Deceas'd.*

1704. *Britannia Triumphans: or the Empire Sav'd, and Europe Deliver'd, by the Success of her Majesty's Forces under the Wise and Heroick Conduct of his Grace the Duke of Marlborough. A Poem.*

1705. *Gibraltar: or the Spanish Adventure. A Comedy as it was Acted at the Theatre in Drury Lane.*

1706. An *Essay on the Operás after the Italian Manner, which are about to be establish'd on the English Stage: With some Reflections on the Damage which they may bring to the Publick.*

1706. The *Battle of Ramillia: or, the Power of Union. A Poem. In Five Books.*

1707. *Prologue to the Subscribers for Julius Caesar, Spoken by Mr. Betterton, Written by Mr. Dennis.* In the *Muses Mercury* for January.

1707. The *Masque of Orpheus and Eurydice, Ibid.* for February.

1707. *Song,* and *Epitaph Writ by Boileau for his Mother's Tombstone, Ibid.* for April.

1708. The *Character of a True Friend,* in the *Oxford and Cambridge Miscellanies.*

1709. *Appius and Virginia. A Tragedy as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, by Her Majesty's Sworn Servants.*

1709. A *Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions: By the E. of Roscommon, Mr. Dryden, Mr. Dennis, Mr. Norris, Mrs. Kath. Phillips, Philomela, and others. Most of them never before Printed.*

1711. *Reflections upon a late Rhapsody called An Essay upon Criticism.*

1711. An *Essay upon Publick Spirit: being a Satyr in Prose upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times, the Chief Source of our present Parties and Diversions.*

1712. An *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: with Some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator.*

1713. *Remarks upon Cato, A Tragedy.*

1714. A *Poem upon the Death of Her Late Sacred Majesty Queen Anne, and the Most Happy and Most Auspicious Accession of his Sacred Majesty King George, To the Imperial Crowns of Great Britain, France and Ireland. With an Exhortation to all True Britons to Unity.*

1715. *Priestcraft Distinguish'd from Christianity.*

1716. *A True Character of Mr. Pope, &c To Mr.* ———. Probably by Dennis.

1717. *Remarks upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer; with Two Letters concerning Windsor Forest, and the Temple of Fame.*

1717. *Proposals for Printing by Subscription the Select Works of Mr. John Dennis, In Two Volumes Octavo.*

1718/19. *Select Works.*

1720. The *Invader of His Country: or The Fatal Resentment. A Tragedy, As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, By His Majesty's Servants.*

1720. The *Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar, Call'd by Himself Sole Monarch of the Stage in Drury-Lane; and his Three Deputy Governors. In two Letters to Sir John Edgar.*

1720. The *Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar, and his Three Deputy Governors, During the Administration of the late separate Ministry. In a Third and Fourth Letter to the Knight. With a Picture of Sir John, Drawn by a Pen, exactly after the Life.*

1721. *Proposals for printing by Subscription in two Volumes in Octavo the following Miscellaneous Tracts, written by J. D. I. The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry. II. Rinaldo and Armida, a tragedy, etc.*

1721. *Original Letters, Familiar, Moral and Critical. In Two Volumes.*

1722. *Julius Caesar acquitted, and his Murderers condemn'd, in a Letter to a Friend: shewing that it was not Caesar who destroy'd the Roman Liberties, but the Corruption of the Romans themselves. Occasion'd by two Letters in the London Journal on the 2d and 9th of Dec.*

1722. A *Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, A Comedy. Written by Sir George Etheridge. In which Defense is shewn, That Sir Fopling, that Merry Knight, was rightly compos'd by the Knight his Father to answer the Ends of Comedy; and that he has been barbarously and scurrilously attack'd by the Knight his Brother, in the 65th Spectator. By which it appears that the Latter Knight knows nothing of the Nature of Comedy.*

1722. *A Short Essay toward an English Prosody,* in the second edition of James Greenwood's An *Essay towards a Practical English Grammar.*

1723. *Remarks on a Play, call'd The Conscious Lovers, a Comedy.*

1724. *Vice and Luxury Public Mischiefs: or Remarks on a Book Intitul'd The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vices Public Benefits.*

1726. The *Stage Defended from Scripture, Reason and the Common Sense of Mankind for Two Thousand Years. Occasion'd by Mr. Law's late Pamphlet against Stage Entertainments. In a Letter to* ———.

1727. *Miscellaneous Tracts written by Mr. John Dennis in Two Volumes. Vol. I Containing I The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry. II Rinaldo and Armida, A Tragedy. III An Answer to Mr. Collier's Short View of the Stage.* Only one volume was ever published.

1728. *Letter against Mr. Pope at Large, Daily Journal,* May 11.

1728 (?). The *Faith and Duties of Christians. A Treatise in Eight Chapters—Written originally in Latin by the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Burnet, Master of the Charter-House. Translated into English by Mr. Dennis.*

1728. *Remarks on Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock. In Several Letters to a Friend. With a Preface, Occasion'd by the late Treatise on the Profound and the Dunciad.*

1729. *Remarks upon Several Passages in the Preliminaries to the Dunciad, both in the Quarto and in the duodecimo edition, and upon several Passages in Pope's Preface to his Translation of Homer's Iliad, In both of which is shewn the Author's want of Judgment. With Original Letters from Sir Richard Steele, from the late Mr. Gildon, from Mr. Jacob, and from Mr. Pope himself, which shew the Falsehood of the latter, his Envy, and his Malice.*

1733. A *Treatise concerning the State of Departed Souls Before, and At, and After the Resurrection. Written originally in Latin by the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Burnet, Master of the Charter-House, Author of the Theory of the Earth. Translated into English by Mr. Dennis.*

1817. A letter *To the Rev. Dr. xxx* and part of an essay—*The Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry; and of the Degeneracy of the Publick Taste,* in the *Monthly Magazine,* June 1.

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